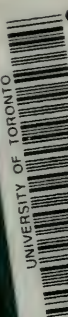


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HENRY IRVING

BY

WILLIAM WINTER

*"In the reproof of chance
Lies the true proof of men."
—Shakespeare.*

NEW-YORK
GEORGE J. COOMBES
No. 5 EAST SEVENTEENTH STREET
MDCCCLXXXV



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TO
THE GARRICK CLUB, OF LONDON,
THIS BRIEF HISTORY AND SLIGHT MEMORIAL OF A
COMRADE'S TRIUMPHS IN A FOREIGN LAND
IS RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED
BY THE AUTHOR.



PREFACE.

THIS book is designed to be a Record of Henry Irving's professional career upon the New-York stage and a Study of his Acting. The sketches that compose it and that are now brought together in a condensed and carefully revised form were written by me in the New-York Tribune in the performance of a literary duty, which also was a pleasure. The motive that prompted them was my wish to form and suitably to express a thoughtful and useful estimate of the art of a great and famous actor, whose advent in America would mark an epoch in the history of our stage and be attended with important and incessant consequences. This object might have been, by other hands, more ably pursued and more thoroughly accomplished; but at least it has been sought with careful diligence and active sympathy. The Record is accurate: the Study is earnest: and although the manner of both be somewhat desultory I yet venture to indulge the hope that this book will be accepted as a serviceable addition to the dramatic chronicle of our time, and as a well-meant and well-deserved tribute to an extraordinary man. The chapter on the Influence of the Stage was written by me in the North American Review, and it is introduced here as, perhaps, an appropriate statement of the rank and power of the institution to which this actor has given such faithful, honourable, and beneficent service.

New-York, February 16, 1885.

W. W.



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"Nay his Honours are a great part of the Honour of the Times; when by this means he is grown to Active Men an Example; to the Sloathful a Spur; to the Envious a Punishment."—BEN JONSON'S *TIMBER*.

ILLUSTRATIONS.

PORTRAIT OF HENRY IRVING Frontispiece

PORTRAIT OF ELLEN TERRY.....Facing page 59



I

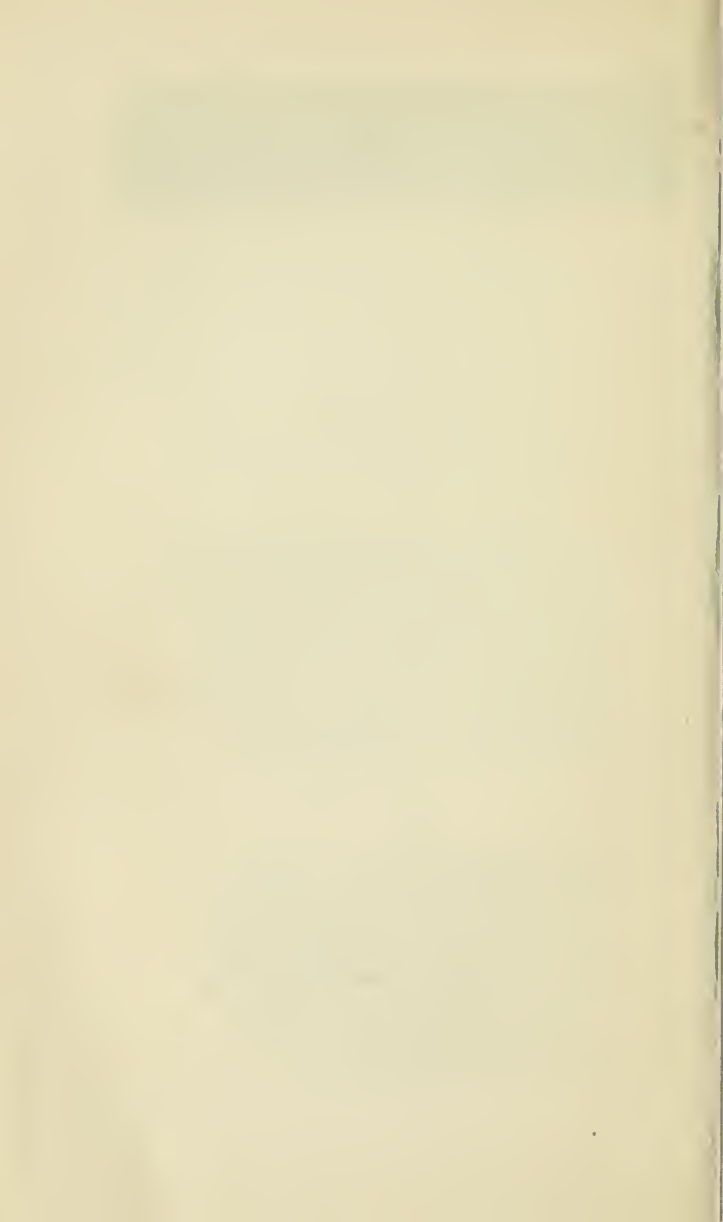
WELCOME.

I

IF we could win from Shakespeare's river
The music of its murmuring flow,
With all the wild-bird notes that quiver
Where Avon's scarlet meadows glow;
If with our joy could blend, at meeting,
The love that lately grieved to part,
Ah, then, indeed, our song of greeting
Might find an echo in his heart.

II

But since we cannot, in our singing,
That gladness and that love entwine,
At least we'll set our blue-bells ringing,
And he shall hear our whispering pine:
And these shall breathe a welcome royal,
In accents tender, sweet, and kind,
From lips as fond and hearts as loyal
As any that he left behind.





II

THE FIRST NIGHT.

OCTOBER 30th, 1883.—Mr. Irving is a novelty, but he is not a stranger. Hundreds of Americans have seen his performances when he was acting at his own theatre in London, and thoughtful observers, whose duty it has been within the last ten years to consider and record the reciprocal influences of the stage and society, have naturally been compelled to take into their account the originality, force, charm, and commanding success of this remarkable actor. Wherever, in the intellectual world, an earnest and devoted spirit is steadfastly at work, no matter what may be its line of thought or its vehicle of expression, a source of power is soon established, which makes itself felt, through either sympathy or antipathy, in every fibre of the mental experience of the age. Such a spirit has animated Mr. Irving. He is a man thoroughly in earnest, a thinker, a writer, a manager, a representative leader of the dramatic art. He has placed himself in the capital city of the world, and there has gathered into his hands all the cords that work the complex machinery of the contemporary stage.

It was inevitable that the influence of such a man should be recognised in America as well as in Europe; that his history should become known to this people; and that a wish for his personal presence should spring up and thrive in all the communities of the western world.

Mr. Irving has been an actor for twenty-seven years. Seventeen of them he has passed in London, and during the latter half of that time he has stood at the head of the actors of England. No man could have had such a career, exerted such an influence, or attained to such a position, without being possessed of abilities of a high order, used with wisdom, sincerity, and resolute will. Mr. Irving possesses these abilities, and has used them in this way. The structure of his renown, accordingly, rests upon a solid foundation of worthy achievement. Judgment and taste differ—and will continue to differ—in defining his talents and estimating his rank. But upon one point opinions are agreed: he is a thorough actor. That he should come to America at this time is in the natural sequence of events. His coming has been sought, from this side of the Atlantic, for the last six years. He has been invited, again and again—not because he had a position to make, but because his position was already made. It ought, accordingly, to be said, at the outset, that Mr. Irving cannot be viewed as an actor who comes here upon trial. His name and fame were long ago established. He is “a sensation” in America, because a new-comer; but he is not a probationer, and he is not a surprise. The audience that greeted him last night in the Star Theatre, where he made his first professional appearance in this country, received him in this spirit,—hailing him,

not as a stranger, but as an honoured friend. A more brilliant audience has not been seen, and a more cordial welcome was never uttered.

A true actor can indicate his powers as surely—though not as fully—in a character of melodrama as in a character of poetic tragedy. The elder Booth once electrified an audience in so slight a part as the *Second Actor*, in “Hamlet.” Genius, the French philosopher said, is a question of a quarter of an hour. Five acts of Shakespeare and four hours of labour are not indispensable to a revelation of the divine spark. It is the manner in which a thing is done that, first of all, declares the actor. To act a great part greatly is to reach the highest success; but a small part may be acted in a great manner, and may be made the medium of a wonderful message. Mr. Irving might have come before us in “Hamlet.” He has preferred to appear as *Mathias*, in the drama of “The Bells.” His judgment was vindicated. The part is one that utilises all disorganising excitements, and one that is helped, and not hurt, by Mr. Irving’s strangeness and by all his peculiarities. He obviously felt great excitement, and so did his audience; but this served only to intensify the emotion of the actor and the enjoyment of the house.

Mathias is a murderer, who suffers, and he may be depicted in either of two ways—as suffering from the fear and dread of detection, or as suffering from this cause intensified by remorse. Given from the former point of view, he would be morally and spiritually superficial, and the excellence of the best performance of him would be scarcely more than technical—because the analysis, not of a human being, but of a

grisly fiend. Given from the other point of view, he may be made the vehicle for profound, subtle, and pathetic study of human nature, in one of the most terrible forms of its possible experience, tremulous under those haunting influences which, to the imagination, are so thrilling and so splendid. Remorse, it should be remembered, is a misery that is only possible to goodness. A radically wicked person is incapable of suffering anything but physical pain. *Iago* never suffers. *Sir Edward Mortimer*, who has committed a partly justifiable homicide, suffers the torments of the damned, because his conscience condemns his crime, and because he dreads that, through detection, his honour will be stained before the eyes of the world. The analysis of his torments is afflicting; yet we should watch them almost as we watch a dying reptile, but that his inherent goodness renders them no less mournful than terrible. All spectacles of pain and wretchedness are distressing; but the quality of the distress which they cause is determined by the nature of the sufferer.

Mathias has done a cruel murder, and robbed his victim, and prospered by the spoils of his crime; but the consequences of his crime have followed him in his own soul. He walks the world in pomp and pleasure—with a slow, corroding misery eating out his heart. He is a living monument of the retributive vengeance of Divine Justice. It could not be difficult for an experienced actor to play this part effectively, in a professional sense. Mr. Irving has accomplished far more than that. By giving this murderer a human heart, by making paternal tenderness the motive and passion of his life, and then by

depicting, with consummate skill, those agonies of the soul which only such a soul can suffer, he creates an image not less pitiable than horrible of that forlorn humanity which evil has conquered and which inexorable justice must now destroy. It is possible to misunderstand an actor's intention; but Mr. Irving produced the effect of pathos as well as largely the effect of terror, the latter being predominant, and his method, in the latter, being wonderfully subtle and picturesque. The feverish alertness engendered by the strife of a strong will against a sickening apprehension, the desperate sense, now defiant and now abject, of impending doom, the slow paralysis of the feelings, under the action of remorse — these, indeed, were given with appalling truth. Since the days of Charles Kean no display of morbid spiritual vivisection has been seen upon the stage that resembles the dream of *Mathias* as acted by Henry Irving. The audience was spell-bound during this scene. In the long backward of recollection no parallel arises to this sustinment of agony in that most difficult of all dramatic conditions, soliloquy. Here is the spring of Mr. Irving's power. He wields a fascinating and victorious magnetism, essentially personal. Nothing else could sustain an actor, in his complete hold of an audience, through so terrible an ordeal.

The effect upon that audience was singular; and, in fact, this actor is one who will always leave upon the same assemblage strangely different impressions. Speaking with reference to execution and quality, it may be said that a taste for the acting of Mr. Irving has to be acquired. But when once it has been acquired it gives its possessor great delight. Mr. Irving is a peculiar

actor. His personality and his methods of art are characterised by special fascinations, and also by special and perplexing singularities. His oddities help to make him unique; and these oddities are not, to all persons, agreeable. Some of them, indeed, are defects. Mr. Irving's stage-walk, for example, is sometimes stilted and angular; and this peculiarity, although really natural to him, and one of the results of nervous excitement, has the effect of artifice, wherever it chances to be inharmonious with the character that he personifies. His vocalism, furthermore, particularly under the stress of agitation, is sometimes inarticulate and indistinct. He indulges freely in what Shakespeare has designated "flaws and starts." He uses at times the rapid, tripping enunciation and song-like cadence which are peculiar to the English speech of foreigners, particularly the French. His machinery includes darkly lowering glances, of portentous menace. His voice, notwithstanding that he is a man of sinewy physical constitution, wiry, nervous, and sustained by patient, resolute will, is neither copious nor resonant, not at all the organ of a Forrest or a Salvini, and, therefore, although his tones are often tender, or piercing, or vibrant, he is apt to disappoint the listener, at moments when great vocal resources are desired, as a relief, by the over-wrought emotions of his audience. His range of facial expression includes a variety of meanings, but these are mostly weird, eccentric, saturnine, mystical; and hence his face is less eloquent with the elemental feelings of human nature than with its wildness, strangeness, and sombre and agonising pathos — the poetry of storm or of desolation — under the ravages of tragic imagination, intellectual strain, and

miserable experience. His smile, indeed, is one of singular sweetness; and sometimes it touches his sad, scholastic, high-bred, noble features with the perfect sunshine of beauty. But equally by temperament, physique, taste, and training, Mr. Irving is a man of mysterious quality and exceptional characteristics. Such a man is not readily comprehended; but, when he is comprehended, he inspires a profound sympathy and admiration.

It is to the puzzling influence of this complex web of beauties and defects, to the prevalent and predominant singularity of the actor, that divers commentators monotonously and uselessly refer in ringing the changes upon Mr. Irving's "mannerisms." Some minds will always reject what they cannot understand, and censoriousness ever prefers to dwell upon a fault rather than a merit. But this is not the road to the truth. Neither like nor dislike, neither praise nor censure, is of the least importance alongside of the necessity of interpretation. The liberal judgment pierces to the meaning of the blemishes and of the vagueness, while recognising and admitting the beauties and the light. Mr. Irving's nature, while capable — as the deepest and sternest of tragic natures often are — of erratic and dazzling excursions into the domain of grim, or grotesque, or farcical humour, and while certainly sensitive and tender, is doubtless more particularly restricted to the region of the melancholy, morbid, saturnine, sardonic, and terrible. His art-methods, inevitably, would, under these conditions, be touched with mysticism and grim extravagance; and they certainly are affected by physical impediments — visible wherever repression is substituted for utterance,

and the shuddering quiver of the quicksand stands for the explosion of the tempest. But,—allowing for every physical inadequacy, and looking through all spiritual vagueness and mystery,—the sensitive and thoughtful observer cannot fail here to discern a glorious instrument of dramatic emotion, sensitive, tremulous, true, a soul and mind rich in the capacity to feel and to translate the tragic aspects of humanity. And, surely, this in acting is the main thing: not simply a professional skill; not simply a felicity of special effort; but the potency of individual resource,—behind that skill and effort,—which makes the true actor a perennial spring of refreshment to the intellectual life of his age.

Mr. Irving, like every other human creature, has his limitations. The work that he displayed as *Mathias* made evident the delicacy of his physical powers, the intricate character of his artistic means, and the perplexing eccentricities of his style. He is the flute and not the trumpet. He could no more produce that mellow thunder of voice, rugged grandeur of form, and affluent and torrid sensuality, which only just fell short of transcendent genius in Edwin Forrest, than he could fly through the heavens. The flow of his spirit could never be the great ninth wave that seems to crush the crag whereon it dashes. He stands forth with all his equipments in order and all his fine faculties in the leash. He is an intellect enthroned above the passions. He knows that inspiration may come, but he will leave that to take care of itself. He works with a thousand subtle touches, with many a seeming accident of shadow, with many a sudden jet of light. He will sometimes leave the senses

unthrilled. He will sometimes be fantastic in his ideals. He will sometimes push singularity of treatment to the verge of excess. But he speaks to the imagination and to the soul; and, in everything that he says and does and is, you feel the nameless charm of genius. Ample discussion may be anticipated as to this actor's ideals of character, as to his suitability to certain parts, and as to the exact nature and limits of his powers of expression. But nobody will doubt that he is a true and sure artist, and that his work is guided by intellectual purpose and pervaded by that indescribable attribute which is the consecration of poetry:

"The light which never was on sea or land."

The original of "The Bells," "Le Juif Polonais," is a dramatic study by Messrs. Erckmann-Chatrian, and in the French was not designed for representation. Mr. Leopold Lewis made the version of it that is used by Mr. Irving, but he has not made it much more than a one-part play. This is noted, not as an objection, but as a fact. The one-part play is sometimes an excellent thing—as may be seen, for example, in Horne's "Death of Marlowe," which is not only one-part but one-act. In construction a chief merit of "The Bells" is that it so deftly surrounds a terrible and tragic experience with the sweet cheerfulness of a happy domestic life. *Mathias*, this agonising wretch, is framed in sunshine. The cold lustre that is made to play about the mystery is, likewise, to be noted as a subtle and brilliant effect of art. Ever and anon, through fifteen years of shuddering dread and stealthy, furtive precaution, the assassin hears the sleigh-bells tinkle that were on his victim's horse on

that terrible winter night of the nameless and hideous murder. This aerial voice, borne on the frosty, glittering air, creates an emotion of apprehensiveness, weird, solemn, and awful. The movement of the play, likewise, is direct and rapid, and its language is appropriate and sincere.



At the close of the performance, Mr. Irving—who had already been six times recalled—was again summoned before the curtain, and he then replied to the public greeting, as follows :

“LADIES AND GENTLEMEN : I believe it is a custom with you to allow an actor to thank you for the pleasure you have given to him ; and I will avail myself of that custom now, to say that I thank you with all my heart and soul. It seems to me that the greatness of your welcome typifies the greatness of your nation. I thank you, and ‘beggar that I am, I am even poor in thanks.’ Let me say that my comrades are also deeply sensible of your kindness, and let me add that I hope you will give a warmer welcome, if such were possible, than I have received, to my associate and friend, Miss Ellen Terry, who will have the honour of appearing before you to-morrow night. And finally, if it be not a liberty, will you allow me to express the hope that ‘our loves may increase even as our days do grow.’”





III

THE GOLDEN AGE OF ACTING.

THE public has just witnessed a remarkable success, achieved by that intellectual and devoted actor, Lawrence Barrett, in a poetical tragedy, of American authorship, which has held the stage continuously and prosperously for many weeks. The best of American comedians and one of the few great actors of the world—Mr. Jefferson—is acting in New-York to crowded houses, and with a potent and beautiful alliance of art, pathos, and humour. In a neighbouring city, within a few days, the leader of the stage in America,—Edwin Booth,—only recently returned from triumphant successes in Europe, makes his reëntrance upon that field of dramatic art which owes more to him than to any other living man. In the populous and busy West that Roman hero, John McCullough, is received with affection and acclaim. Across the sea, in the capital city of England, the beautiful and noble American actress, Mary Anderson, has met with a triumph, unmatched for suddenness and splendour since the days of Miss

O'Neill. In other directions and in other ways the stage is wielding extraordinary power. This period in theatrical history may be marked, therefore, as impressive and auspicious. These, in fact, are the "palmy days."

It is noticeable, though, that the stage of the present is always "degenerate." Persons who seek "the golden age" invariably find that it retires backward as they advance. Meres, in "Wit's Treasury," which is dated 1598, when complimenting the poet Drayton, speaks of "these declining and corrupt times, when there is nothing but roguery in villainous man." No doubt the stage was comprehended in that censure. Yet that was the time of Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, and Burbage. Old Cibber, in his age, could see little or no merit in contemporary players; yet that was the time of Garrick and Maria Arne, of Mossop and Spranger Barry. Smollett's *Squire Bramble*, speaking no doubt the actual belief of that great delineator of character and manners, denotes a little later period—that of 1770—as "these times of dulness and degeneracy." Macklin, when an old man, used to cry out, disdainfully, "where are your actors?" Yet Macklin, who had lived in the period of Dogget, Mrs. Barry, Barton Booth, Mrs. Oldfield, and Mrs. Bellamy, might, even as he spoke, have seen Charles and John Kemble, Edward Shuter, Thomas King, Mrs. Dancer, and Mrs. Siddons. In 1811, Mary Godfrey, one of the intimate friends of Tom Moore, writing to him about the theatre in London, said that "an author who hopes for success on the stage must fall in with popular taste, which is now at the last gasp and past all cure." Yet at that very moment Kean and the Kembles, and Fawcett and Munden were in full career.

In 1845, Mr. James Rees, a lachrymose chronicler of the American theatre, described the genius of the drama as "an owl," sitting "in gloom and eternal night," upon the wreck of the stage. Yet that was the time of Junius Brutus Booth, Edwin Forrest, Thomas Hamblin, Charles Burke, and the most illustrious of the house of Wallack. So in the present period our theatre is very frequently disparaged, in comparison with a boasted but not very well comprehended past, notwithstanding that, in the day now passing, the American stage is adorned and dignified by Edwin Booth, Joseph Jefferson, Lester Wallack, John McCullough, Lawrence Barrett, William Warren, John Gilbert, Mary Anderson, and Clara Morris; while across the Atlantic, the brilliant traditions of Garrick, Kemble, Macready, and Phelps are sustained and augmented by the genius and devotion of Henry Irving, by the ample scholarship of men like William Creswick and John Ryder, by the fine brain and splendid energy of Genevieve Ward, by the rich, fascinating, woman-like loveliness and the exquisite art of Mrs. Kendal, by the intellectual character and fiery force of Ada Cavendish, and by the original mind, the weird, magnetic temperament, and the strange, bewildering beauty of Ellen Terry. The truth is that, in theatrical history, every barren present becomes a golden past, the moment it has drifted sufficiently far away upon the ocean of time to be hallowed with the lovely mist of antiquity.

The bright periods in the history of acting arrive whenever it happens that one man has arisen, who, to genius and character, adds devotion and inflexible will. Such a man dignifies and adorns the stage,

and invests it with an allurements which the public cannot resist; and then, suddenly there ensues a great theatrical prosperity. This was so when Garrick appeared — of whom the explanation is suggested in these significant words, in George Anne Bellamy's "Apology": "As Mr. Garrick was come to London" (so wrote that sprightly actress), "I was obliged to attend to the duties of my profession. The most intense application was necessary for those who fought under his banners. As he was unremitting himself in his attention to business, he expected those he employed to be the same." Here, plainly enough, is the man of genius, character, and will, whose method is hard work. The result was inevitable. The Garrick period in stage history, though not all golden, had its golden side; and Macready, Charles Kean, and Mr. Irving, since then, have only repeated the experience of Garrick.

Lord Byron, writing in 1817, said that his personal association and acquaintance with Drury Lane Theatre, of which he was once a manager, in association with Whitbread and others, had given him the greatest contempt for the stage. Allowance has always to be made, by the student who would know Byron's real opinions, for that woman-like habit of strong statement in which he generally indulged, and which made him, on one occasion, say that he considered Shakespeare to be "a damned humbug." Yet, aside from exaggeration, this testimony of a great mind, as to the state of the theatre at an important epoch, is useful and significant. That period, evidently, had little that was "golden" about it. Edmund Kean, the most comet-like and dazzling dramatic genius that ever England has produced, was, indeed, acting at that time. But Ed-

mund Kean had neither moral stability, inflexible devotion, nor steadfast will. Genius, as old Bernard noticed, is apt to hold up more glasses than one — and Edmund Kean was a type of all that, in genius, is wayward and deplorable. The Kembles might have done much more than they actually did, but neither of them seems to have been animated with more than a personal ambition. The phlegmatic temperament of John Philip Kemble and the selfishness of his great sister, Mrs. Siddons, were notorious. After the ebb of the Garrick days, in fact, the tide did not again come to flood till the days of Macready and Charles Kean; and after their time the British drama languished till it was revived by Henry Irving. Each of these actors has made a golden era in stage history — and for a like reason. Mr. Irving himself has said that “the fortunate actor is the actor who works” — and work is his principle, exactly as it was the principle of Garrick. But work will not accomplish all. There is a crowning and irradiating attribute, and that is charm. Much depends upon the quality of the worker. When genius works, having the implements of character, devotion, and will, to work with, the result must always be victory.

“The reason of things,” said that wise old divine, Dr. South, “lies in a little compass, if the mind could at any time be so happy as to light upon it.” The reason of Mr. Irving’s great success, and of its permanence, lies in these three words — character, work, and charm. Some things in this shifting world are not matters of opinion. The renown of an actor, whose conduct of life has proceeded on the lines of high motive and firm principle, becomes woven into

the texture of his countrymen's experience. His personality and his influence are a part of the common life of his time. Mr. Irving, from the first step of his career,—which, of late, is as well known here as in England,—has kept his resolution fixed upon the attainment of a great object. He has believed in his profession and in himself. He has aimed at the highest and has never faltered. He has comprehended the intellectual spirit of the age—its thirst for sensuous beauty, for luxury, for perfection of form, and, above all, its passionate admiration for valiant and absolute achievement; and therefore he has been thorough, and has made even success his servant. He has pressed other arts and the mechanical sciences into the service of the art of acting. He has played for a high prize, and he has never been afraid to venture a high stake. He has had the audacity of far-sighted courage—the steadfast, self-centred strength of cool, intrepid, patient, predominant intellect. And, which is indeed extraordinary, he has preserved, throughout the development of that inflexible character, something of the gentleness of a child and the dreaminess of a poet. When such a man as this has gained a large share in the guidance of the stage the world may well feel that the theatre is an instrument of vast, varied, and beneficent power. The harp-strings slumber till touched by the magician's hand. Henry Irving is a magician to-day. On both sides of the ocean the English race hears him with honour; and the echo of his earnest and splendid artistic life will sound on in human hearts long after its music has ended in the silence that waits for all.



IV

CHARLES THE FIRST.

OCTOBER 31st.—A greater contrast could scarcely be imagined than that existing between “Charles I.” and “The Bells.” The latter is a monologue of misery, touched now and then with a lurid glare of insane humour. The former is a grave historical drama, depicting the domestic life and the surrounding political tribulations of a king, during the days of danger and turbulence that immediately preceded his downfall and his death. “Charles I.” was presented, last night, at the Star Theatre, and Mr. Irving, in his embodiment of the king, gave proof of his versatility, as well as a large revelation of the lofty moral aspects of his mind, his peculiar vein of melancholy tenderness, and that noble serenity of repose which is such an excellent thing in dramatic art.

The piece is new on the American stage. It is a four-act play, by Mr. W. G. Wills, the novelist, written in a style of blank verse which occasionally becomes poetical, but, for the most part, remains simply useful. The first scene is at Hampton Court, where the *King* is shown with his wife and children

around him. The second scene is at Whitehall, where the *King* and *Cromwell* are confronted, and where an attempt to arrest the sovereign person is frustrated by his watchful wife. The third scene is in the royal camp, at Fairfax, and it ends with the betrayal and delivery of the *King* by his treacherous adherent, *Lord Moray*, into the hands of the Parliament,— then armed against him. The fourth and last scene is again at Whitehall, where the *Queen* at first begs *Cromwell* to spare her husband's life and then defies him, and where the royal martyr takes his last farewell of wife and children.

The slender story thus told has been made by a falsification of history in several important particulars. Oliver Cromwell, perhaps, was ambitious to make himself King of England, and to establish his family as a royal one, but there is no reason to believe that he was the mean knave represented in this play. King Charles was a man of pure life and exalted character, refined, accomplished, and devout, but he was not altogether the saint depicted by Mr. Wills; for he was very crafty, and his mind was so saturated with the idea of the divine right of kings that it had little or no sense of the obligation of absolute truthfulness to his people. Charles was not betrayed by any one man, but was sold by the Scots to the English Parliamentary chieftains; and in his last hours only two of his six children were with him, while the queen was in France.

It must be considered, however, that the only way in which an effective drama can be made, on an historical subject, is the free way of making facts entirely pliant to dramatic purpose. Shakespeare's "Henry VIII." and Bulwer's "Richelieu," for example, are

good plays, but dubious history. Mr. Wills could only make his subject successful on the stage by exalting *Charles* and degrading *Cromwell*, and by providing personal situations—cabinet pictures—instead of complex, populous, and diffused historical paintings. He has done this, and done it well. There is not, indeed, much invention in his work. The effect most nearly electrical occurs at the close of the third act, in *Charles's* solemn, withering denunciation of his betrayer: but this—as a dramatic expedient—is a situation reminiscent of *Henry V.* and his false Lords, and of *James V.* and *Lord Seyton*, in “The King of the Commons.”

The felicity of the author is in contrivance of pictures that carry onward his simple plot, and in selection and combination of incidents that are authentic, or that may rationally be presumed. The scene that presents King Charles among his children, repeating an old ballad to them, while all around him are whispers of vague danger and menace, is conceived with tenderness and with a fine perception of dramatic suspense. The characters, if somewhat inaccurately drawn, are nevertheless drawn distinctly and with the power of earnest conviction. Pathos inspires the beautiful speech at the close, and the curtain falls upon Charles's famous “Remember” (spoken, actually, to Bishop Juxon, on the scaffold), which is made his last word to his devoted wife, in solemn and passionate adjuration that she will always love and cherish his memory, and that a certain miniature of herself may rest upon his bosom in death. This drama inspires affection toward the *King*, and leaves the spectator in noble grief at the ruin and death of a good and lovable man.

The fine chapter in "Waverley" which describes the execution of *Fergus* may be named as typical of the anxious and grieved emotion that pervades it; and as that chapter is one of the gems of literature a work must indeed be sincere, tender, and lovely in spirit that can be thought worthy to stand beside it.

Mr. Irving as *Charles I.* reproduces the well-known Vandyke face and figure as perpetuated on the glowing canvas of that great painter, at Windsor and at Warwick. As a matter of fact the unfortunate monarch grew gray and haggard toward the last, and his hair and his beard were long and were neglected—for he suffered much. But the actor is wise who comes not too near to fact. Mr. Irving reproduces that dark, melancholy, stately figure to which imagination has been accustomed; and just so, no doubt, King Charles appeared, in his better days, when walking in the sweet sunshine of an English summer, on the terraces of Hampton Court. Mr. Irving's acting in this part is calmly vigorous with the weight of personal character; various with the play of a fine intellect; excellent for its even sustainment of royal dignity; richly complex in its elaborate, courtly manners; and fraught equally with sombre gravity and tender feeling. The part admits of no wild outburst of morbid frenzy, and of no fantastic treatment. Royal authority, moral elevation, and domestic tenderness are the chief elements to be expressed; and Mr. Irving found no difficulty in expressing them. What most impressed his auditors was his extraordinary physical fitness to the accepted ideal of Charles Stuart, combined with the passionate earnestness and personal magnetism that enable him to create and sustain a perfect illusion.

This performance is less striking than that of *Mathias*, less relative to the imagination and the passions, and therefore less indicative of the characteristic attributes of his genius. But it is rounded and complete; and to the student it is especially significant, as indicative of the actor's method of applying what is termed "natural" treatment to the poetic drama.

Mr. Irving presents the perfection of aristocracy. There is a moment in this performance—when the king stands before the fire-place, just after his dismissal of *Cromwell* and *Ireton*—that seems to take you into the literal presence of Charles I., even as he lived and acted. The more this impersonation is studied the finer, indeed, does it seem to be, and the more beauties, of this subtle order, does it disclose. Mr. Wills's play has not provided a great situation for anybody whom it introduces, and Mr. Irving's acting is, therefore, the more remarkable for the illusion he sustains and the effects he produces by means of personal character and admirable art. The blemishes are in the elocution. *Mathias* is the greater performance of the two: not in moral attributes, weight of character, gracious and lovely personal traits, or the fine detail of manners; but in power to deal with the passions through the imagination, and to sustain a human identity in an ideal region of terror and pathos.

The more surprising and absorbing performance of the night was that of Miss Ellen Terry, who came forward as *Queen Henrietta Maria*, making her first appearance in America. She was welcomed with enthusiasm and was called before the curtain again and again, as the night wore on. Her dazzling beauty as the Queen, and her strange personal fascination,—in

which a voice of copious and touching sweetness is conspicuous,—would partly explain this result. But, “There’s more in ’t than fair visage.” The Queen has to exhibit impetuosity and caprice. She has to express conjugal tenderness and to illustrate a woman’s fidelity to the man whom she loves, when that man is in trouble and danger. She has to ask a boon from a tyrant, and to turn upon him, in scorn and noble pride, when repulsed. The situations are conventional. What shall be said of the personality that can make them fresh and new? Miss Terry is spontaneous, unconventional, and positively individual, and will use all characters in the drama as vehicles for the expression of her own. This, in *Queen Henrietta Maria*, was a great excellence. Miss Terry’s acting has less mind in it than that of Mr. Irving, though not deficient here, but it proceeds essentially from the nervous system—from the soul. There were indications that her special vein is high comedy; but she was all the woman in the desolate farewell scene that ends the piece, and she melted every heart with her distress, even as she had charmed every eye with her uncommon loveliness. With eloquence and with spiritual majesty, she possesses a sweetness that softens the hard lines of ancient tragic form, and leaves the perfect impression of nature.

The common idea of a queen, and one that has usually found a liberal acceptance on the stage, presupposes that majesty is furnished with a poker instead of a spine, and uses no language save such as is stiffened with starch. With this notion, certainly, Miss Terry’s *Queen Henrietta* was inharmonious; but, while she remained a sweet and sympathetic woman, there never was an

instant requiring that true loftiness which is in the soul when she did not make the situation royal with a dignity far beyond buckram.

A queen is not less a queen because she can be simple and gentle. A noble English lady, long since dead, used to relate one of her experiences with a real queen, when, as a child, she lived at Versailles, and was the pet of Marie Antoinette. That queen had been playing with her in the morning, but was now to receive, sitting at the bottom of her bed, a group of ambassadors. The child wished to see this ceremony, and, for this purpose, hid herself in the bed-curtains. When the ambassadors had come, and the child looked forth upon the scene, such a change had taken place in the countenance of the queen, only just now her merry and laughing play-fellow, that she was both astonished and terrified; nor was she ever able, through after years, to forget that imperial face. This is the kind of queen that Miss Terry has presented—and with a loveliness of presence and a purity and silvery music of speech that any royal lady might be proud to display.





V

LOUIS THE ELEVENTH.

NOVEMBER 6th.—A wise Frenchwoman said that “admiration is always impatient to put an end to itself, and is glad to seize the first opportunity of doing so.” She was acquainted with human nature. Few persons can long endure to behold the success of others. There are signs that admiration of Mr. Irving would expire if it could, but the opportunity seems to be slow in coming. The renowned actor has now appeared as *Mathias*, *Charles I.*, and *Louis XI.*, and as long as he continues to give such performances as he has hitherto given admiration, assuredly, must bear its impatience. Recognition of such brilliant efforts is a manifest duty. It ought, likewise, to be a heartfelt pleasure. This is a wide world. There is room in it for everybody. And human life is not so richly blessed with the refining and ennobling influences of intellect and genius that any one of them can wisely be spared.

Last night Mr. Irving appeared as *Louis XI.*, and was welcomed by one of the most appreciative assemblies of the year. His fame is high, in this particular part, and it soon became evident that his fame is de-

served. It was one of those exceptional performances that may justly be called great. It surpassed that of Charles Kean in the same character. It was appalling in its truth and its power.

The character of *Louis XI.* comes out of history, and it was long ago immortalised by Scott, in his novel of "Quentin Durward." The play comes, by the pen of Mr. Boucicault, out of the stage literature of France; and when Charles Kean was here, in 1865, it was made familiar throughout this country. The character is hateful and the play is sombre; but the hateful character exerts the sinister fascination of potent and triumphant evil, and the sombre play is fraught with absorbing interest, because of the grisly vitality of this hideous character. Since, however, *Louis XI.* is repugnant, because mankind will soon hate what they fear, the part cannot have a permanent success, and, indeed, it is only endurable when splendidly shown—as it is at present.

It would appear to be Mr. Irving's method first to conceive and assume the temperament of a character and then to allow the various attributes of that character to crystallise around that temperament and take from it their colour and direction. He indicated the temperament of *Louis XI.* as that of humourous, grim, and bitter sadness, and with this he coloured every attribute of the part. This course—warranted no less by knowledge of human nature than by the facts of history—is both wise in policy and subtle in art; for by this means the character is elevated and brought within the range of human feeling—a feeling difficult to define, but one that would be pity if it dared. The attributes of *Louis XI.* are authority, sus-

picion, craft, jealousy, bigotry, cold intellect, sardonic pleasantry, and superstitious fear. He can likewise act with malignity, ferocity, and fury. These qualities, however, are blent with imperial predominance, polished speciousness, consummate tact, and the histrionic faculty of being "all things to all men." It would be difficult to imagine a character more obnoxious, or one less susceptible of the investiture of even a fearful fascination. The actor who can cast a halo of romance over such a baleful compound as this must possess, in a high degree, both imagination and passionate sensibility.

Mr. Irving has not failed to consider that *Louis XI.* is "born in the purple"; that he has long exercised the habit of command; that he is old and ill; that his mind is haunted, harassed, and terrified by superstition; that his memory is loaded with horrors and his conscience corroded with remorse; and, though malign and terrible, that he is, nevertheless, a king and a man. These things he makes to be felt, and by means of these he lifts the character and invests it with an atmosphere of awe. You are not drawn toward him, indeed, by the compassion that his pathos inspires at two or three points in the performance of *Mathias*. The voice of Mr. Irving, when, as *Mathias*, he recognises a piece of the Jew's gold, and murmurs, in a tone of such bleak anguish, "not for them! for me, for me," will not, surely, soon be forgotten by those who once have heard it. The wild agony of this forlorn wretch, when in his lonely chamber, at midnight, and half stupefied with wine, he tries to dance, and to sing a gay song, keeping time to the dying music of distant revellers, was a sight too sad for tears. So, too, in the court-room, the desperate and broken

man's mechanical reiteration of his single poor and useless defence—"a dream, a dream, a dream, a dream"—had an air of dramatic misery most appalling and lamentable. These effects, when viewed in retrospect, seem even finer than they did when they were passing. There are no such human moments as these in the personation of *Louis XI.* Yet, by suggesting the spiritual isolation and personal wretchedness of this king, in association with his prodigious abilities, his humour, his piety, and his self-poise in the wide and turbulent political arena on which he plays his part, the actor has adroitly contrived to give to him a sad and lonely as well as a baleful magnificence; so that, while he never ceases to be dreadful, equally he never ceases to charm.

The strangeness and the eccentricities of Mr. Irving adjust themselves to this character, in his performance of it, precisely as they did in his assumption of *Mathias*. The execution matches the ideal. The part is full of abrupt transitions—from weakness to strength; from fear to frenzy; from deadly, implacable resolution to pious and contrite humility; from the easy mood of hypocritical humour to the sudden, hideous joy of triumphant malice; and this long fever of craft, wickedness, and pain is rounded at last with a frightened and frightful death. All along the line of the part, accordingly, are excellent opportunities for this actor's incessant vitality and complex method, and especially for that picturesque mystery of manner through which his magnetism plays, like the lightning in the cloud. The wan face, the dark and sunken eyes, the thick, black eyebrows, the lowering, evanescent smile, the rapid yet stealthy movements—all these characteristics of *Louis* Mr. Irving has reproduced. His royalty

is innate—precisely as it was in *Charles I.*—and although this is a monarch who cares little for the mere shows of sovereignty, and can unbend and be familiar and even jocose, for a purpose, he remains a monarch, in every instant of his being, by virtue of that indefinable but undeniable majesty of character which makes certain men the superiors of their race. His peculiar locomotion and his still more peculiar elocution harmonise with the part and heighten its weirdness. The courage of Raphael, who could paint black iron bars across his beautiful group of the Angel releasing St. Peter from prison, did not surpass that of Mr. Irving, in his utter sacrifice of symmetry and music to what he regards as nature and truth in the embodiment of his ideals of the morbid, the monstrous, the agonising, and the terrible aspects of humanity, transfigured in the world of the imagination.

Much is said about his “mannerisms.” It is a convenient word, and it seems to be freighted with a vast significance. “The Spanish fleet thou canst not see,” says the Governor, in “The Critic,” “because it is not yet in sight.” Nothing solaces the puzzled mind like one of these comprehensive and final reasons. Yet it might not be amiss to remember that genius is a law to itself, and that its success in art is the vindication of its means. One of the greatest orators that ever lived was Rufus Choate; and, as all competent judges who ever heard him speak will testify, Rufus Choate’s oratory defied all the laws that have been set down for the government of that art. So much was this the case that another great orator, Wendell Phillips, once referred to Choate as “a monkey in convulsions.” The seeming chaos,

however, had a central purpose and a law; and the orator was always triumphant. Furthermore, there never was an actor, that attained to eminence, who was not as distinctively marked as Mr. Irving is with personal peculiarities. Garrick sputtered. Mossop inflated himself like the arrogant and bellicose turkey. Edmund Kean croaked like a raven. John Philip Kemble had chronic asthma and spoke in a high falsetto. Macready stammered and grunted. Holland snuffled. Burke twisted his spindle legs. Forrest "chewed the cud," like an ox. Charlotte Cushman had a masculine figure, a gaunt face, and a broken and quavering voice. These things have little or nothing to do with the essential question. The art of acting is a complex art, made up of many arts. It is not an actor's business always to be graceful in his attitudes and movements, or always to be regular and polished in his periods and enunciation. Every artist has a way of his own, by which he reaches his results. Mr. Irving's way is not the best way for everybody, because the only true, right, and conclusive way of universal human nature; but, undoubtedly, it is the best way for him. He produces marvellously fine effects by it, and therefore he is right in using it. Within a certain field, and up to a certain point, it is invincible and triumphant. As far as he now stands disclosed upon this stage Mr. Irving is a thorough and often a magnificent artist, one who makes even his defects to help him, and one who leaves nothing to blind and whirling chance; and if the light that shines through his work be not the light of genius, by what name shall it be called?



VI

SHYLOCK.

NOVEMBER 7th.—It is usual upon our stage to represent “The Merchant of Venice” in a mutilated condition. This custom has arisen from the fact that the character of *Shylock*, after Macklin restored it to the theatre, was adopted by the tragedians, and made to overshadow the other characters in the piece. Several parts were then cut out, others were shortened, the comedy element was much depressed, and the play was limited to four acts and ended with the trial scene. The justification of this proceeding was necessity. The tragedian, if he uses this piece at all, must use it as a “star” piece. A company of comedians capable of playing it as pure comedy has seldom or never existed, and, at present, it could not, in our country, be rallied round a tragic actor, to “star” him in *Shylock*. On the other hand, played by incompetent performers as pure comedy it would be intolerable and therefore practically useless to the stage.

In Shakespeare’s time it appears to have been treated as comedy, with *Shylock* as an eccentric character part — played by Burbage, who wore a red wig. In Queen

Anne's time Lord Lansdowne's perversion of the original was accepted, with Dogget as *Shylock*, who wore the red wig and turned the Jew into farce. Macklin took up *Shylock* in 1741, and astonished his generation by showing what could be done with the part as Shakespeare wrote it. Edmund Kean came later and surpassed him. Stage history since then teems with fine Shylocks,—Henderson, Cooke, the elder Booth, Macready, the elder Wallack, G. V. Brooke, J. W. Wallack, Jr., Edwin Booth, E. L. Davenport, Bogumil Dawison, and Lawrence Barrett, for example,—but “The Merchant of Venice” itself has scarcely ever been treated in a thoroughly artistic and right manner. It is absolute comedy, consistent and harmonious in tone, but for a little excess of emphasis in the part of *Shylock*, and exceedingly beautiful alike in its contrasts of character, the invention of its scenes, and the poetry of its language. It ought always to be played as a comedy, and played with but the slightest condensation of the text. The most complete presentation of it that has been made in our time was made by Edwin Booth, at the Winter Garden Theatre, in 1867.

Last night at the Star Theatre the public had an opportunity of seeing what Mr. Irving has done with this good old play, in his London Lyceum revival of it, which was reproduced in New-York. His work commends itself as right in spirit, fine in scholarship, and glowing in execution. The play was given in five acts, and was treated throughout as a comedy. The scenery was sufficiently correct and often beautiful. Most of the scenery that Mr. Irving has displayed here will be remembered as remarkable for harmony of composition and for a rich mellowness of colour, highly

tributary to illusion. For "The Merchant of Venice" several of the sets were bright and gay; but the more dusky and sombre pictures were the more poetical. Mr. Irving's company, likewise, was for the first time shown in its strength. Mr. William Terriss made *Bassanio* appropriately handsome, manly, noble, and gay. A strong and picturesque performance of the *Prince of Morocco*, notable for sonorous and discreet delivery of a difficult text, was given by Mr. T. Mead. *Antonio* was made dignified and earnest by Mr. T. Wenman, who is a judicious and polished speaker, sensible of the delicate shades of meaning in the text. The address of the *Duke of Venice* could not be better done than it was by the veteran Mr. Howe, whose dignity and feeling, in this character, graced by suggestions of ripe experience, wisdom, and humour, made this a most satisfactory representation. Miss Milward was gentle and pleasing in *Jessica*.

Mr. Irving presented *Shylock*. His ideal is right and his execution is full of subtle touches of art. Douglas Jerrold said of Edmund Kean that his *Shylock* made you think of "a chapter out of the Book of Genesis." The Jew may be presented as acting from personal covetousness and hatred, or he may be presented as acting from this motive, commingled with high and stern religious fanaticism. The latter view exalts the character, and therefore is the right one. *Antonio*, in *Shylock's* mind, has outraged *Shylock's* nation and religion as well as *Shylock's* self. The Jew, in pursuing *Antonio* to the torture and the death, is feeding his ancient grudge; but likewise he is avenging the wrongs of his sacred people. He thinks himself the vicegerent of Divine Justice, and he has "an oath

in heaven." This, apparently, was Edmund Kean's theory of the character, and this is the ideal reasserted by Henry Irving. His mental grasp of the part is perfect. His expression of austerity, of vindictive malignity, of the sullen resentment that broods over long-hoarded wrongs, was wonderfully fine — backed by great weight of intellect and by fierce, hot-blooded, inveterate purpose. His denotement of *Shylock's* domestic affections, which are passionate and pathetic, was clear and thrilling — especially in the frantic lamentation over his fugitive daughter, and the heart-broken words about *Leah* and the turquoise ring.

His usage, in each performance, is to stud the work with indications of the physical as well as the mental peculiarities of the man whom he has undertaken to embody. King Louis's trick of stroking his withered cheeks with the ends of his fingers is an example of this sort of embellishment. It is the province of an actor to give a body to the soul which an author has created, and this mechanism is Mr. Irving's recognition of that province. He may carry this embellishment to excess, and he sometimes does, especially in the poetic drama. His *Shylock* was profusely tinted in this way, and thereby made a little prosy. Ideals ought to be shown in the light of poetry, and not in the light of common life. Mr. Irving's occasional staccato elocution was also against him, in the level speaking of *Shylock*. For the raving of the infuriate Jew, in the street scene, he was found deficient in overwhelming physical force; but he wrought up this scene with a controlled intensity of passion that was painfully tragic. He reached his summit and climax in "No tears but of my shedding"; and

afterward, in the cold,*determined, hellish cruelty of purpose that animates *Shylock* in the trial scene, his "Come, prepare" was spoken with superb effect. Such single achievements as these flash backward and irradiate a whole performance with the lustre of mind, just as the heat-lightning illuminates a summer evening sky. By these an observer looks into an actor's thought and discerns what is known and meant by him. Mr. Irving's ideal is truer than his execution of it. His exit from the trial scene, in its Hebraic dignity, was an apex of perfect pathos. The great audience made the house resound here with plaudits and would have recalled him — but he did not return.

Miss Ellen Terry presented *Portia*. The comedy of this actress is delicious. Her voice is perfect music. Her clear, bell-like elocution is more than a refreshment—it is a luxury. Her simple manner, always large and adequate, with nothing puny or mincing about it, is a great beauty of the art which it so deftly conceals. Her embodiment of a woman's loveliness, such as, in *Portia*, should be at once stately and fascinating and inspire at once respect and passion, was felicitous beyond the reach of descriptive phrases. During most part of the comedy she was arrayed in a robe of what seemed flowing gold. In the trial scene she wore scarlet velvet. Her delivery of the mercy speech was a perfectly modulated and beautiful piece of eloquence. Her sparkling by-play, in the "business" about the ring, can only be called exquisite. Better comedy has not been seen.



VII

DISCURSIVE IMPRESSIONS.

NOVEMBER 12th.—Mr. Irving's *Louis XI.* is so excellent a work that it surpasses even the great performance of that part which was given by Charles Kean; and to say this is to offer an uncommon tribute. The statement, however, is just, and it implies no disparagement. Mr. Irving is a younger man than Charles Kean was when he acted here, and therefore to even the expression of age and weakness he is able to impart, and does impart, a greater emphasis of nervous vitality than was possible to the older and feebler actor. Mr. Irving, furthermore, has greatly the advantage of his famous predecessor, in facial expression and vocal variety and power. The play of feature in Mr. Irving's countenance throughout this personation is marvellous. There are moments when the soul of the king is mirrored in his face, and every thought seems to cast a shadow. Then, too, the performance excels its prototype in the qualities of intellectual predominance, demoniac weirdness, and grim humour. Finally, Mr. Irving's monarch is more regal throughout, and, in the death scene, more

awful. As a rule it is best to hold fast by *Dogberry's* opinion, that "comparisons are odorous." But in this instance comparison is instructive and expressive; and it can give no offence—seeing that Charles Kean has long been dead, and that his generation has passed away. Mr. Irving's treatment of the character of *Louis XI.*, furthermore, is almost exclusively his own. He has imitated nobody; whereas Charles Kean's performance is known to have been modelled, to a considerable extent, on that of the French actor by whom the part was originally played. Mr. Irving follows the lines laid down by the author and by history; but most of his illustrative "business" is his own.

In *Shylock* Mr. Irving's ideal undoubtedly is sound. His *Shylock* hates *Antonio* because *Antonio* is a Christian, "but more" because *Antonio* "lends out money gratis," and spoils the trade of usury in Venice. Religious fanaticism and sordid meanness are thus blended in Mr. Irving's *Shylock*, even as they are in the Jew of Shakespeare. But it is in the execution of an ideal that an actor is expected particularly to excel; and in some parts of this Mr. Irving was inadequate to his own intention. There is a possibility of being too "natural." The great persons in Shakespeare are men and women, it is true; but also they are more than men and women. They have their roots in the actual soil of human nature, but they rise far above it. They neither speak the language nor do the deeds of common life. They speak, for the most part, in blank verse. They dwell and move in a poetical atmosphere. They are ideals, exaggerations, persons above the plane of ordinary human existence. Accordingly, in the embodiment of them

a fine poetical generalisation seems preferable to a minute definement of particulars; just as, in another branch of art, the oil-painting with its rich tones and its mystery is preferable to the photograph. The Apollo is the image and emblem of perfect human beauty; and yet no part of it is made with exact fidelity to the shape of an actual man. This, of course, cannot be a new doctrine, to such a scholar as Mr. Irving has shown himself to be. It appeared, however, that in the acting of *Shylock* his frequent close adherence to actual life involved the sacrifice of a legitimate and desirable poetic exaggeration.

In the street scene, after *Shylock* has heard of his daughter's flight, Shakespeare authorises a torrent of passion, and, furthermore, the passion is explosive. Mr. Irving's acting, throughout this scene, is beautiful in its variety and modulation and in its skilful use of his strength and adroit concealment of his weakness; but his method is that of the exact reverse of explosive passion. The current is turned inward. The spectacle is like that of breakers on a distant reef—so remote that you cannot hear them. Doubtless this is the passion of a man; but is it the passion of this particular man, at this particular place? Is it the actually uttered passion of *Shylock*? Or is it only the artistic suggestion of what that utterance ought to be? Mr. Irving has embellished the part with abundance of illustrative "business," and he has carried this thoroughness of embellishment into every portion of the play; and all this artistic care tends toward the structure and exposition of an actual segment of human life, which is cut off and set in a picture. The *Prince of Morocco* and his dusky attendants advance into Bel-

mont, and retire from *Portia's* presence, to the sound of cymbals and oriental music. Gondolas, laden with maskers, flit to and fro in the canals of Venice. Merry revellers troop through the deserted street, after *Jessica* and *Lorenzo* have fled, and then the lonely figure of the Jew, returning from his supper of hatred with the Christian, comes rapidly across a bridge and pauses at his own door; and so it is seen that the tempest must soon and terribly break, from that despoiled and outraged hearth and heart. The trial scene is full of happy touches of a realism that strictly harmonises with the poetry of Shakespeare's conception. The use of the populace is excellent. And all tends to the completeness of stage picture. A play was never more carefully set than "The Merchant of Venice" has been set by Mr. Irving. But with reference to the exceptional character of *Shylock* it seems just to say that a more vivid poetical treatment and a more copious and splendid outburst, not of rant but of passion and power, would stir the feelings more deeply than any grace of detail can ever do, and would fill the imagination with a sense of magnificence which otherwise is lost. Public acceptance, touching such a matter as this, is inconclusive — for it accepts everything. There is a true thought by old George Villiers which bears on acting as well as on other phases of human endeavour: "We can no more judge of the real value of a man by the impression he makes on the public than we can tell, from the stamp, whether the seal that made it was of brass or gold."

Mr. Irving is an actor who has distinct reasons for his methods of art. No thoughtful observer will deny that his *Shylock* is consistent, harmonious, and natural;

and it has impressed many judges as superlatively fine. It will be remembered for attributes distinctively intellectual: whereas his *Mathias* and *Louis XI.* must live in memory as works of imagination, executed with strong and fluent emotion and consummate skill; while his *Charles I.* is an ideal of majesty, and has the mellow colour and sombre richness of an old historic painting.





VIII

LESURQUES AND DUBOSC.

NOVEMBER 13th.—In 1796, between Liewesaint and Melun, in France, the Lyons mail-coach was set upon by robbers; the postilion and courier were shot and killed; and the coach was plundered. The leader of the robbers, the actual murderer who figured in this scene of crime, was a villain named Dubosc. An innocent man, Joseph Lesurques, who chanced to bear a strong personal resemblance to this miscreant, was accused of this crime and was brought to trial; and, partly by the testimony of witnesses who swore directly to his identity with the murderer, partly because of the cruel precipitancy of an unjust judge, named Jerome Gohier, who rejected a conclusive alibi and assumed his guilt, he was convicted and condemned to death; and subsequently he suffered upon the scaffold. He left a widow and three children. His body was buried in sombre and dismal Père La Chaise, near to the famous tomb of Abélard and Heloise, and his grave is now marked by a monument, of white marble, bearing this inscription: “A la mémoire de Joseph Lesurques, victime de la plus déplo-

nable des erreurs humaines. 31 Octobre, 1796. Sa veuve et ses enfants, martyrs tous deux sur la terre, tous deux sont réunis au ciel." Lesurques left this letter, addressed to the murderer, which was published at the time: "You, in whose stead I am about to die, rest content with the sacrifice of my life. If ever you fall into the hands of justice, think of my children, covered with disgrace, and of their mother, a prey to despair, and do not prolong the misery caused by the fatal likeness that I bear to you." In 1800 the truth became known, and the assassin Dubosc was executed.

Upon this basis of facts the melodrama of "*Le Courier de Lyon*" was constructed and written in 1850, by Messrs. Moreau, Sevaudin, and Delacour, and it was produced at the *Gaieté Théâtre*, in Paris, with *Lacressonnière* as *Dubosc* and *Lesurques*. Its success was great, and it has remained a favourite on the French stage. In the original piece *Lesurques* is led to the scaffold, but when the play was adapted for the English theatre, in 1851, it was provided with a happy conclusion. A little later Charles Kean brought it out at the *Princess's Theatre*, in London, using a version made by Charles Reade, and himself performing the double part. In 1877 Mr. Irving revived it, with abundant success, at the *London Lyceum*, under the name of "*The Lyons Mail*," and last night he presented it here, at the *Star Theatre*. It had before been given in New York, but never under favourable circumstances, or by an actor comparable with the extraordinary man who now accomplished one of the most surprising and admirable achievements in versatility and characterisation that have been seen upon the stage.

"The Lyons Mail" is in three acts. The first shows the commission of the crime. It is devoted mainly to *Dubosc*. It is made up of exciting incidents and it presents a fearful and ghastly picture. Its atmosphere is that of horror and suspense, and it clearly discloses the web of fatal circumstance in which the innocent man is deplorably entangled. The second act is devoted to *Lesurques*, and it shows the rectitude and loveliness of his character, the gentleness, the firmness, the simple candour and nobility with which he confronts a cruel and terrible fate. Its chief incident is the rejection by him of his father's appeal, that he will avoid by suicide the disgrace of a death upon the scaffold. The situation at this point is one of absorbing interest. The third act reverts to *Dubosc*, and presents him in a scene of brutal depravity, surveying from a garret window the preparations for the execution of his double. The end is his disappearance and the almost instant entrance of the vindicated *Lesurques*.

The subject of this piece is horrible; but so is the subject of "Macbeth." Horror, like beauty, is a legitimate element of art, if only it be treated in an artistic manner. There are aspects of human nature and conduct and of actual life which ought never to be described or shown. But when, as in this case, some of the noblest traits and finest feelings of humanity and some of the most dramatic and instructive contrasts of character can be derived from the analysis and exposition of a theme of crime, the use of that theme, in an intellectual and artistic way, is right; and the subject becomes elevated by the use that is made of it. *Mathias*, in "The Bells," for example, is only a burgomaster, in

an obscure village of Alsace, who has done a murder. But Mr. Irving, transcending the conditions supplied by the authors, personates *Mathias* in such a way as to lift him into the domain of poetry and make him a character representative, as long as the stage shall possess a history or art shall be recognised among men, of the action of remorse in the human soul. Define him as you like, call him by what name you please, and prove by invincible logic that he figures in one of the thinnest of plays, the fact remains that this embodiment is worthy to stand among the most appalling types of human remorse that you can summon out of the literature of the past. *Manfred* is not more picturesque, nor does he suffer more, nor does he impart a more significant moral lesson — notwithstanding his sublime surroundings and his magnificent blank verse.

So in "The Lyons Mail," which simply shows how near an innocent man came to being sacrificed for the crime of an abominable savage, the actor has, in still another way, elevated the theme. This time it is by the astonishing amplitude of the various nature that he has poured into a common dramatic mould. The piece counts for little. If *Dubosc* and *Lesurques* were cast to different players and all the parts were acted with average merit upon the peaceful level of mediocrity, it probably would count for nothing. If Mr. Irving were to appear simply as *Dubosc* he would only make dramatic art tributary to the showing of a monster; and that would be useless and wrong. By treating the piece with intellectual earnestness and with perfect refinement of touch, and by playing both *Lesurques* and *Dubosc* entirely well, he gives pathetic reality to a

fearful human experience; he denotes the almost incredible variety of attributes which, by intuition and imagination, may be circumscribed within one and the same human being; and he affords a singularly brilliant illustration of the actor's art. In this latter particular the performance has an instructive value which ought especially to be recognised. Spectators of stage-art have too much the habit of thinking that an actor does no more, and can do no more, than what has been laid out for him to do by the dramatic author. Hence it is that judgment is so often expended upon the literature of a play instead of the acting. Hence when an actor plays *Hamlet* or *Lear* his auditors are so often lost in the everlasting inquiry as to what Shakespeare meant. Hence the common injustice of measuring an actor's essentially dramatic faculties and skill by exclusive reference to the question of his fidelity to the author. Mr. Irving—like M. Coquelin on the French stage, and like Mr. Jefferson on our own—has, all along, been remarkable for his insistence upon what the actor gives to the character that he assumes and the subject that he treats. Anybody can stand and repeat the grand soliloquies of *Macbeth*; but the actor must present *Macbeth* in physical person, with all the fire of his wicked, towering ambition and all the passion and conflict of his fiend-haunted soul crystallised in a distinct and positive body. It is what Mr. Irving himself has done with his various characters—his getting inside of them and making them live as actual men—that shows his superlative excellence as an actor. And he will largely benefit the public in this country if he should help to teach it, in looking at acting, to lay aside for a while the “book of the play,” and not to

suppose that everything depends upon correct punctuation. It is not meant that an actor shall be accounted right who begins by undertaking to present *King Lear* and ends by presenting *King John*; but that the actor must embody characters with something of himself and according to known and undeniable standards of human nature. "After the nicest strokes of a Shakespeare, a Jonson, of a Wycherley or an Otway," says Fielding (in "*Tom Jones*"), "some touches of nature will escape the reader, which the judicious action of a Garrick, of a Cibber, or of a Clive, can convey to him."

A finer exemplification of abstract dramatic faculty than this which Mr. Irving gives in "*The Lyons Mail*" is not within remembrance. The callous villain *Dubosc*, with his hideously expeditious ways and his grotesque humour, can never be forgotten. The action of turning over the corpse, to rifle its pockets, would alone have sufficed to bespeak an artist. There are many deft touches like this, in the work, and they make it a perfect showing of a hideous ruffian. The manly fidelity, simple pathos, and lofty heroism of the character of *Lesurques* were conveyed with the same truth and with touching sincerity. The farewell to the daughter in the prison created an effect of passionate sorrow, and was, indeed, expressed with tenderness and manly strength. The almost instantaneous changes create an effect of astonishment: but this is only an ancient expedient of theatrical celerity. The truly astonishing and impressive thing is the instant change made by the actor, not merely in external appearance but in the moral nature and the distinguishing mental attributes. After all the brutal wickedness of *Dubosc's*

garret scene — a terrific exhibition of insensate bestiality—he comes forth, in one moment, tranquil, noble, gentle, the image of devout virtue that has felt the winnowing of the wings of death and is humbly and gratefully triumphant over danger and misery.

Miss Ellen Terry acted *Janette*. It is a little part, but every opportunity that it provides was improved. Miss Terry's personality is invested with a spiritual quality which makes her inharmonious with such dramatic conditions as those of this character. Yet it is no uncommon thing to see a sweet, fragile, lovely woman infatuated with a human brute.





IX

THE BELLE'S STRATAGEM.

NOVEMBER 20th.—Last night, after a repetition of the sombre drama of “The Bells,” in which Mr. Irving again presented his impressive psychological study of remorse, in the character and experience of *Mathias*, Mrs. Cowley’s comedy of “The Belle’s Stratagem,” reduced to two acts, was presented, with Miss Ellen Terry as *Letitia Hardy* and Mr. Irving as *Doricourt*. The performance of this old work in seven brief and rapid scenes proved more enjoyable than the representation of it in all its acts has commonly been. It was shorter and it was pungent and pointed. There is, to be sure, a sacrifice of clearness and coherence, and the comedy becomes farcical; but the quintessence of the characters and of the fun is preserved, and this suffices for Mr. Irving’s purpose.

Doricourt and *Letitia Hardy* are familiar acquaintances. The former is Mrs. Cowley’s dilution of Congreve’s *Valentine* in “Love for Love,” and the latter is her echo of Arthur Murphy’s *Maria* in “The Citizen.” A girl who masquerades in order to bewitch or cajole or mystify her lover is one of the usual figures

in the old plays. *Letitia Hardy* is this type, and doubtless as good as any representative of womanly piquancy that could readily be found for the practical purposes of stage illustration. She has sentiment and tenderness, but the essential fibre in her character is glittering gaiety. She can love and be sincere, but she will begin by teasing and tantalising. Miss Ellen Terry, with her buoyant and sparkling frenzy (there is no fitter word with which to denote her essential characteristic), is here suited with an identity into which her own nature can abundantly flow. She suffused the earlier scenes with a fine petulance and a high-bred distinction, touched with the pretty, pouting, mischievous wilfulness of a wayward child. She carried the hoyden scene with abundant animal spirits and a delicious spontaneity of archness, drollery, and downright broad humour — which, however, never passed across the line of refinement. The offence was given to manners and taste, but not to morals or to the heart. In the minuet she was a vision of swan-like elegance, grace, and woman-like fascination — a true type of elegant, tantalising, high-bred coquetry. The rich and flexible delivery of the text, so full of light and shadow, and as various as the ripple of running water, added to the charm of this work, and made it one of the most finished bits of comedy that have been set upon our stage. Miss Terry, at the singing of “Where are you going, my pretty maid?” carried the house completely away from all sobriety of judgment.

Mr. Irving’s good qualities in *Doricourt* were seen to be a superb aristocratical elegance, perfect manners and costume, and a fine dexterity in treating the somewhat trivial incidents amid which the character is

exhibited. His *Doricourt* has a distinct individuality, being a luxurious, polished man of the world, well contented with himself, ardent if not passionate, and capable of serious, manly feeling and conduct, though generally self-indulgent and volatile. But there is in Mr. Irving himself an intellectual elevation, and his person, face, and manner are characterised by a romantic strangeness and sombre quality of thought, which make him inconsistent with such an ideal as *Doricourt*. He wins admiration, accordingly, less for actually impersonating this part—for merging himself into it, and carrying it with dash and sparkle—than for the proficiency with which he indicates its texture and significance. His crisp delivery of the text, particularly in the “aside” speeches and when a dash of satire is essential, will be remembered as especially felicitous. Mr. Irving and Miss Terry were called before the curtain seven times in the course of the night. Mr. Terriss presented a capital *Flutter*,—alert, easy, garrulous, incessant, comical, a true and amusing type of mendacious vacuity; but the part is reduced to a sketch.



All that has been said in recognition of Mr. Irving's intellectual leadership, and of his puissant and thorough method of dramatic art, was justified by his impersonation of *Louis XI.*, given yesterday afternoon, November 20th, before an audience mainly composed of actors. He has not, since the remarkable occasion of his advent in America, acted with such a noble affluence of power as he displayed in this effort. It was not only an expression, vivid and profound, of the intricate, grisly, and

terrible nature of *King Louis*; it was a disclosure of manifold artistic resources, the fine intuition, the repose, and the commanding intellectual energy of the actor himself. An intellectual audience — alert, responsive, quick to see the intention and to recognise each point, however subtle and delicate, of the actor's art — seemed to awaken all his latent fire and nerve him to a free and bounteous utterance of his own spirit. More than one scene was interrupted by the uncontrollable enthusiasm of the house, and eight times in the course of the performance Mr. Irving was re-called. A kindred excitement was communicated to the other actors, and an unusual spirit of emulation pervaded the company. Mr. Mead, as the old monk, set forth a work mediæval in tone, replete with ecclesiastical dignity, and borne along with weight of genuine character and much felicity of vocal power. The audience and the performance made up a memorable scene.





X

SOURCES OF STRENGTH.

NOVEMBER 25th.—Mr. Irving's first engagement in New-York was ended last night. The four weeks during which he has acted at the Star Theatre have been, to students and lovers of the dramatic art, pleasant and beneficial. Much has been enjoyed and something has been learned. Above all, the exercise of thought has been compelled—and that is always a blessing. There have been twenty-nine performances, presenting, in succession, "The Bells," "Charles I.," "Louis XI.," "The Merchant of Venice," "The Lyons Mail," "The Belle's Stratagem" (in Two Acts), a single Act of "Richard III.," and a recitation of Thomas Hood's poem "The Dream of Eugene Aram." Mr. Irving has been seen in *Mathias*, *Charles I.*, *Louis XI.*, *Shylock*, *Lesurques*, *Dubosc*, *Doricourt*, *Gloster*, and *Aram*. Miss Ellen Terry has appeared as *Queen Henrietta*, *Portia*, *Janette*, and *Letitia Hardy*. Conspicuous successes have been gained by Mr. Terriss, Mr. Mead, Mr. Wenman, Mr. Tyars, Mr. Archer, Mr. Howe, Mr. Andrews, and Miss Milward. It has been a time of earnest, reso-

lute, ambitious, adequate effort, upon the stage, and of quick appreciation and enthusiasm in front of it. The Irving engagement marks an epoch in the history of the American theatre. The prosperity of the dramatic art receives from it an extraordinary impetus, and it will be attended with consequences far-reaching and valuable, both on the stage and in the public mind.

The reason of this is obvious—or ought to be—to all who have thoughtfully followed Mr. Irving's performances. It is no new doctrine that a good actor should be surrounded with good actors; that every part in a play should be judiciously cast; that every play should be set in appropriate and rational scenery, so as to create and sustain an illusion of reality; and that careful attention should be given, in every dramatic performance, to the details of dress and adjuncts, to form, colour, coherence, probability, and all kindred essentials that blend to make the rounded and complete picture. This idea has been formulated before now, and practically pursued, in many theatres of America. Yet its actual prevalence has not been usual or invariable, and no tragedian of our time has been so successful as Mr. Irving in obtaining and holding, in permanent organisation, precisely the right persons and appliances requisite to the attainment of this result. All that he has done has been completely done, and therefore each performance has possessed the interest and vitality of truth. To look back upon the series of pictures that he has presented is to be impressed, almost with amazement, at the reality of them—at the remembered glamour of illusion which, while those pictures were passing before our eyes, made us oblivious of the stage, and aware only of

what were persons, places, and events of actual human life. Furthermore—which is another element in the reason of Mr. Irving's triumph—his completeness has been irradiated with glowing enthusiasm. Upon most intellectual men, in this utilitarian, critical, and expeditious age, sooner or later there falls a blight of languor and dejection. They weary of well-doing; they droop into apathy, sometimes into bitterness; and they cease to insist upon the enforcement of ideas. Mr. Irving, thus far, has escaped this too common experience. His spirit still remains eager, hopeful, buoyant, and resolute—the spirit of a man interested in his time and his avocation, sympathetic with the abounding life which surrounds him, and impelled by “the fixed persuasion of success.” That forceful, alert, and intrepid vitality, guided by a fine intellect and a true taste, evokes the response of pleased attention and eager interest. Life responds to life. No spectator of Mr. Irving's performances could possibly miss in them the consciousness of liberated power. The sense of defeat and sorrow has not been exhaled by them. Something has been attempted. Something has been done. Right or wrong, achievement has been suffused with fire and with light—and that way lies the conquest of the sympathies of this world.

It is not possible to specify and catalogue the several attributes of a human soul. A few of the spiritual facts, however, are visible, and it remains to be said that two other elements in the reason of Mr. Irving's success are, personal charm and a felicitous naturalness of method. In any situation of life the personality of this actor would give the impression of something strange, exceptional, and, in various ways, attractive. In other

words, he is a man of genius ; and, on whatsoever line of thought he might manifest his powers, their manifestation would inevitably be attended with originality and allurements. He has impersonated here nine different men — each one distinct from all the others. That is a practical exercise of the art of acting. Yet in doing this he has never ceased to exert one and the same personal charm — the charm of genialised intellect. The soul that is within the man has suffused his art and made it victorious. The same forms of expression, lacking this spirit, would have lacked the triumph. All of them, indeed, are not equally fine. Mr. Irving's *Mathias* and *Louis XI.* are higher performances than his *Shylock* and *Doricourt* — higher in imaginative tone and in adequacy of feeling and treatment. But, throughout all these forms, the drift of his spirit, setting boldly away from conventions and formalities, has been manifested with delightful results. He has always seemed to be alive with the specific vitality of the person represented. He has never seemed to be a wooden puppet of the stage, bound in by formality and straining after a vague scholastic ideal of technical correctness. This is the naturalness of his method, and this is perfect mechanism — if it be not carried too far. With his ideals — with what was seen to be passing in his mind — it has not been possible in any instance much to disagree. His limitations are found in the physical mediums of expression, and in the realm of what may, perhaps, be suggested, if not described, as the overwhelming ecstasy or frenzy of the passions. He belongs to the traditions of Kemble and Macready, rather than to those of Garrick and Edmund Kean. Yet he is distinct from both of his artistic ancestors,

and in some ways he has gone beyond them. In that field which may be called weird, picturesque, romantic, in the slow vivisection of piteous human misery, his figure stands apart from all others — lonely and alone.

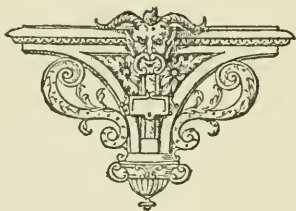
The performance of last night strengthened, without changing, the impressions already made and stated. The simulated fervour and the sardonic satire that are characteristic of Shakespeare's *Richard III.*, Mr. Irving indicates with precision. He appeared in only the first act of the tragedy, which is mainly devoted to that unnatural scene of *Gloster's* wooing of the widowed *Lady Anne*. His recital of "Eugene Aram" was acted remorse, fluent, flexible, eloquent, passionate, and very melodious.



Immediately before the recital of "Eugene Aram," Mr. Irving addressed his audience, as follows :

"LADIES AND GENTLEMEN : I should be unjust to myself if I were to allow this moment to pass without at least endeavouring to express my gratitude for your great kindness to my comrades and myself. When I stood here for the first time, about a month ago, I ventured to express the hope (encouraged by your generous applause) that 'our loves might increase even as our days do grow.' You, upon your part, have fulfilled our highest anticipations. I also bespoke your consideration for my sister artist, Miss Ellen Terry, saying that she would win your hearts ; and I believe I am not wrong, to-night, in thinking that she has done so. We all regret that our stay with you is not longer — that it is not months instead of weeks. But I am not here to bid you farewell. I will only say *au revoir*. We ex-

pect to appear before you again next April, when we shall present 'Much Ado' and 'Hamlet.' These plays were received with favour in our old home beyond the sea, and we trust they will be received with equal kindness in what I will venture to call our new home on this side of the Atlantic. I can do but little to express, in behalf of my associates and in my own behalf, the gratitude that we feel toward the public of New-York. Could I say more I should feel less. We have been happy in your society and we leave you with natural regret."





Ellen Terry



XI

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING.

APRIL 1st, 1884.—The excitement of that cheerful October evening, last year, when Henry Irving made his first appearance in New York, was repeated last night, at the Star Theatre, where “Much Ado About Nothing” was presented, and where Mr. Irving and Miss Terry effected their reëntrance, and were welcomed by a brilliant company, with the heartiest admiration and goodwill. The scene, indeed, was one of unusual brightness and enjoyment, both before the curtain and upon the stage. The applause, upon the entrance of *Beatrice*,—a rare vision of imperial yet gentle beauty!—broke forth impetuously and continued long; and upon the subsequent entrance of *Benedick* it rose into a storm of gladness and welcome.

Mr. Irving and Miss Terry—received here, at the outset, six months ago, more as old friends than as strangers—have now firmly established themselves in the admiration and esteem of the American audience; and, whatever difference of opinion may exist as to the aptitude or felicity of either of them, in any specific character, there is neither denial nor doubt of their

sterling ability, achievements, and merits. They have become a portion of our pleasant, instructive, and valuable experience; and, since the American stage is cosmopolitan, they doubtless will long retain their place among the forces whence our culture—as a people is stimulated and refreshed. The circumstances which attended their reëntrance were confirmatory of their permanent success and auspicious for their future.

“Much Ado” had not before been given in New-York by Mr. Irving, but it had been given by him in other cities, and the rosy accounts of it sent from those cities had inspired a lively anticipation as to its general presentment, and as to the acting of Mr. Irving and Miss Terry in *Benedick* and *Beatrice*. This anticipation was fulfilled. The scenic exposition of the piece was elaborate, sufficiently correct, and often beautiful. “The inside of a church,” as Shakespeare calls it, with his excellent directness, was one of the most imposing sets that have been displayed. The cast was the same, in many features, with which Mr. Irving revived this comedy at the London Lyceum, on October 11th, 1882, and the acting, throughout, was careful, even, and harmonious, as well in the subsidiary parts as in the principals.

Extended comment on the comedy of “Much Ado” is not requisite here. To traverse that familiar field must necessarily be to walk again in the path that many footsteps have already made. The piece was written at what seems to have been the happiest period of Shakespeare’s life—the period when also he produced “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” and “The Merchant of Venice.” To the analytic mind

“Much Ado” is especially interesting as showing the maturity of Shakespeare’s humour, his power to contemplate life in the objective point of view, and to portray it as if seen from above, with all its contrarities and all its lights and shadows. To such a student the comedy is impressive, also, as showing the transfiguring power of Shakespeare’s artistic skill and the fertile wealth of his invention; for in this piece he made an old story new by his treatment of it, and he invented *Benedick* and *Beatrice*, *Dogberry* and *Verges*, and all that relates to them—a remarkable feat of literary creation.

Upon Mr. Irving’s impersonation of *Benedick* it is not easy to form a precise judgment. The performance is interesting and charming. The actor’s personal singularity and the peculiarities of his histrionic method do not detract from its charm: on the contrary, they give it piquancy and make it unique. His way is his own way, and it is richly fraught with high-bred ease, intellectual repose, and demure gravity. He speaks the soliloquies, to be sure, more with the author’s appreciation of them than with the air of the impersonator; but he banters and fences nimbly with the provoking *Beatrice*, and his demeanor in the challenge scene is resolute, dignified, simple, and rightly touched with a tone of dangerous menace. It is a certain moral and mental exaltation in his ideal of the part, combined with a sequent quietude or lack of dash in his execution, that perplex judgment, and make it difficult for an observer to determine whether this is Shakespeare’s *Benedick* or a glorification of it. Whichever it be, it is a rich display of the art which an actor should peculiarly possess—the art to invest

a fanciful conception with a natural body — and it is full of pleasure for those who see it.

The manner characteristic of *Benedick*, as Shakespeare has drawn him, is a buoyant, brilliant, dashing, aggressive manner, largely based on well-nurtured animalism. He is not a man of sentiment and there is no romance in his nature. Of his satirical perception and amused contempt of the romantic, love-lorn swain, his "Poor, hurt fowl! now will he creep into sedges" is exceedingly significant. Before he loves *Beatrice* he has avowed the ideas and feelings and he has implied the customs of a sensual rover; and when at last he does come really to love her—being tantalised, nettled, and stung into the passion by her taunting indifference, her indomitable mirth, her bold, brilliant, physical beauty, and her almost insolent wit—his love stands at the furthest possible remove from anything like spiritual rapture or any sweet tumult whatsoever. It is a jubilant, militant, self-confident love, and were it scorned and repulsed the lover would still remain unhurt. *Henry V.*, in his wooing of his French Kate, is not further away from the mood of *Romeo* than *Benedick* is, in his wooing of *Beatrice*. "From the crown of his head to the sole of his foot," says *Don Pedro*, "he is all mirth: what his heart thinks his tongue speaks." The thought which should prompt caution as to positive definition of *Benedick*, however,—or as to positive definition of *Beatrice*, either,—is the thought that they may, perhaps, have been designed as pretenders to heartlessness, each intuitively suspecting the other, in this particular. They are very similar.

Mr. Irving's humour may, perhaps, be best defined as subtle playfulness. In *Louis XI.* it is the grisly playfulness of the sick panther. In *Doricourt* it is the mocking playfulness of the accomplished and fastidious gentleman. In *Richard III.* it is the heartless, sardonic, cruel playfulness of the astute, hypocritical villain. In *Dubosc* it is the cold, depraved, hideous playfulness of the insensate, swaggering ruffian. In each case it is playfulness — which, of course, may be either amiable or baleful — and it is invariably subtle. It is not the humour that laughs and shakes; it is the humour that smiles; and whether the smile shall be pleasant or unpleasant must depend upon the quality of the character out of which the humour is derived. Such humour may surprise and gratify a spectator, but it seldom or never can rejoice him. The word “amusing” seems a strange word to apply to either *Dubosc* or *Louis XI.*; but the most amusing moments that have been provided by the acting of Mr. Irving, thus far, in America, have been provided in those characters.

His *Benedick*, to be sure, amuses, but it is less amusing than charming. In this part his playfulness reappears under still another guise, and is the playfulness of an odd, quaint fellow, eccentric although elegant, and, although volatile and nimble on occasion, mostly observant, quizzical, fond of sagacious rumination, and slightly saturnine. If this is Shakespeare's *Benedick*, Mr. Irving has exactly reproduced him. If not, he has exalted him, intellectually and by personal traits, to a place among the gentle and sprightly satirical thinkers of the Shakesperean world. And this, perhaps, ex-

presses his real achievement — that he has substituted a complex nature, based on goodness, merrily pretending to cynicism, and having rich reserves, for the dashing, predominant, sonorous, gallant known since Charles Kemble's day as the *Benedick* of the stage.

There are certain lines of the play which spring into the memory of every reader of "Much Ado," the moment *Beatrice* is mentioned; and they help to elucidate her character. "A star danced," she says, "and under that was I born. . . I thank my heart, poor fool, it keeps on the windy side of care. . . I was born to speak all mirth and no matter. . . I have a good eye, uncle, I can see a church by daylight. . . I had rather hear my dog bark at a crow than a man swear he loves me." And *Hero*, who knows her best and loves her most, declares that "her spirits are as coy and wild as haggards of the rock. Disdain and scorn ride sparkling in her eyes, misprizing what they look on."

So far as a woman can be understood at all *Beatrice* has commonly been understood as the image and essence of flippant vivacity, strong, bold, brilliant, exultant, but untender and devoid of woman-like gentleness. She is a female *Benedick*, but, like *Benedick*, she is sound and wholesome at heart. If she has not the softness of her sex, neither has she its weakness, its conventionality, its fickleness, nor is there any romantic element in her nature. When once it is touched her heart will glow with generous warmth, but her sense is paramount to her sentiment, and a passionate resentment of injustice, where her family affections are concerned, is the deepest feeling that she displays; for at the very moment when she owns her

love for *Benedick* she pledges him to risk his life in a duel in behalf of another woman.

Miss Terry's art is kindred with that of Mr. Irving, and her success was of the same description. She permeates the raillery of *Beatrice* with an indescribable charm of mischievous sweetness. The silver arrows of her pungent wit have no barb — for evidently she does not mean that they shall really wound. Her appearance and carriage are beautiful, and her tones melt into music. There is no hint of the virago here, and even the tone of sarcasm is superficial. Archness playing over kindness is the leading characteristic of Miss Terry's ideal of *Beatrice*. She is nothing harsher than a merry tease, and in the soliloquy after the arbor scene she drops all flippancy and glows into tender and loving womanhood. A more fascinating personality than this *Beatrice* could not be wished; and Miss Terry's method of expressing it is marked with pliant, effortless power and absolute simplicity.

In these impersonations, Mr. Irving and Miss Terry apparently have chosen — partly with conscious design and partly under the stress of inexorable temperamental conditions — to transfigure rather than literally to interpret the conception of Shakespeare, as to *Benedick* and *Beatrice*. Mr. Irving presents a higher and finer character than *Benedick* is in Shakespeare's page; and Miss Terry presents a more lovely and tender woman than the *Beatrice* of the comedy.

In his dressing and stage-setting of "Much Ado" Mr. Irving has respected the old authorities on the subject — following, indeed, the precedent of Macready, by whom this piece was sumptuously revived in London, at Drury Lane, in 1843. The last war in which

the Italians were involved, while they were under the dominion of Spain, occurred in 1529, and Charles V., of Spain, made a triumphal entry into Messina in 1535 — to which time and circumstances the comedy relates. Dress shapes of the period of Henry VIII., of England, and Francis I., of France, and parti-coloured fabrics, such as were then worn in Europe, are its suitable investiture. On the occasion of Macready's revival its male characters were dressed in close-fitting, parti-coloured suits, with short tunics. Mr. Wallack dressed the play in much the same manner, in his first reproduction of it, on what is now the Star stage, in 1869; and Edwin Booth in 1873, at Booth's Theatre, followed this good example.

“*Much Ado*” has been several times as well set upon the American stage as it is now set by Mr. Irving, if reference be made to dresses and to construction of scenes. The superiority of Mr. Irving's mounting of it consists in the colouring and tone of the scenery, and in a studiously minute attention to minor detail — nothing being omitted, within reason, that can heighten illusion or deepen the effect of nature. It is difficult to keep the judicious line in these matters, and stage-mounting may easily be carried too far. The acting is more important than the trappings that surround it. Much of the scenery habitually used on the American stage, however, is too obviously “scenery,” and it may be said to smell of new paint. In England Stanfield and Telbin, among others, have painted stage scenery, and particular attention has been given there to mellowness of colour and to a due simulation of the effects of time and climate upon architecture. Mr. Irving has lived and laboured where he could have the counsel

of such artists as Alma Tadema and such scholars as Planché. He tells nothing that was not known before; but he practically enforces his lesson, pointing out the right way by zealously pursuing it.

And what is true of much American stage scenery is equally true of much American acting—it is too obviously “acting”; the wires are not concealed. Under the instructive influence of Mr. Irving’s performances numbers of persons have been made to understand this truth, which yet is not a new truth to the habitual thinker upon this subject. From the completeness of the representation of “*Much Ado*,” whether viewed as picture or performance, this is the chief deducible lesson.





XII

PURPOSE IN ACTING.

APRIL 27th, 1884.—Last night, in presence of a numerous assemblage and amidst acclamations of delight as well as many denotements of regret at an impending loss, Mr. Irving, Miss Terry and the London Lyceum Theatre Company took their farewell of America, and closed the first Irving season in the New World. Upon the special performances of the night—although many appreciative words remain unsaid as to the intellectual subtlety and the scholar-like taste with which the several plays have been treated—it is not needful long to pause. Four jewels, each taken from its especial setting, were displayed in one blazing cluster of opulent beauty; and the sense of them that lingers now in memory is a sense of satisfying magnificence.

Mr. Irving endured a severe strain—for he was required to impersonate, in conditions of a climacteric character, the successive natures of *Shylock*, *Louis XI.*, *Charles I.*, and *Benedick*; to reach these conditions without preparatory gradations of advance, and to give the characters all their vitality in an instant. His readiness and versatility astonished even those who

are best acquainted with the resources of his mind. Miss Terry, if less severely tried, was yet fully as responsive to the needs of the hour; and it was obvious, furthermore, that the occasion itself had deeply touched her sensitive heart. The acting of Miss Terry is never a matter of impulse and accident; yet she always liberates her own nature into the nature she assumes, bearing, indeed, a heart that sits ever "on the windy side" of emotion, so that her tears follow quickly upon her laughter. This lively sensibility could not fail to be deeply moved, as well by the sense of parting as by the demonstrative sympathy of the public. No audience of the year has been more thoroughly aroused, or more liberal of its enthusiasm.

The measure of success in acting is found, probably, in the question whether the testimony that an actor bears to human nature is such as matches the best knowledge of that subject which exists in the aggregate mind of the community. To consider that question is to look upon the soul of the actor — his resources of thought, feeling, imagination, and poetry, and the height of his spiritual altitude above the common clay — and thus to discover whether he is an exemplar and leader of men. The purpose of the stage is not merely to amuse a crowd of people for two or three hours, or to show how much more clever one man is than another in a special line of expression, but to display scenes and powers that tell of what human nature is composed and of what it is capable, and so to suggest how sacred our duty is to rule and guide it upon eternal principles of right. So far as anything of this sort can be defined, with reference to the serious design and the latent, inexorable morality that dwell

in all things, this view defines the drift of the stage. A true actor knows this and treats his art in this spirit. This is what Mr. Irving has done and this is the reason of his success. Back of the actor is the lofty, calm, resolute, far-seeing, and noble mind. Real achievement exists by right and not by sufferance. Such a man never can fail in the commanding purpose of his life. Honour goes before him and affection remains behind. Fortunate for the world as for the actor that this should be so. The history of the dramatic art presents many examples, pitiable and pathetic, of men with faculties of a high order who have spent long years of toil in intellectual pursuits, but whose efforts have passed without recognition and without reward. Thrice happy he to whom nature has vouchsafed the investiture of genius, so that his labour becomes glorified, in all eyes, with that mysterious radiance of divinity!



An old Persian proverb says that "the words of a King fall not to the ground." Mr. Irving's farewell speech here finds its place:—

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN: It is my privilege to thank you for all your goodness toward us. I wish my tongue possessed an eloquence that would adequately express my thoughts. On a night that will ever be remembered by us, six months ago, you welcomed us to these boards, and I thank you as the representative audience of the empire city of the United States for the welcome which we have everywhere received from the American people. Not one jarring note, one ungenerous sentiment, has marred the happiness of our

stay among you. Arab-like we closed our tents and travelled to many places, and travelling in America is unlike travelling in England: the distances are greater and the cities are further apart. Some one has kindly suggested that to oblige us they might perhaps be pushed a little together; but we can certainly, after visiting your country, sympathise with the American gentleman who was afraid of venturing forth from his hotel in London lest he should fall into the sea. But wherever we have been we have received a gracious and generous hospitality, and the last four weeks have shown us that New-York has in no way forgotten the first kind greeting she gave us. Of the efforts which have helped to gain your favour it does not become me to speak at length, but thanking you in behalf of each and all I cannot refrain from expressing my pride in the triumph of one who has made an impression on your hearts which will never be effaced. I mean my sister-artist, Miss Ellen Terry. She has won "golden opinions from all sorts of people," her heart is full of gratitude, and by her fireside she will often tell of the kindness she received from the American people. For myself, I have a host of delightful memories. You have shown that upon the broad platform of a noble art the two greatest sections of the English-speaking race are one nation. You have shown that no jealous love of your own most admirable actors has prevented you from recognising the earnest purpose of an English company, and we shall return to our homes with the conviction that, new as our methods may have been, you have set the stamp of undisguised approval upon them, and your generosity is, I am sure, heartily appreciated by the English people. Certainly as long as I have a theatre the doors of the Lyceum will be open to welcome your distinguished countrymen. One is acting there now; others will be there by-and-by; and that we may not be quite forgotten, we are returning soon ourselves; and that we may not be forgotten by you we are returning to you soon. "Dick," said your great Abraham Lincoln to Governor Oglesby, "Dick, keep close to the

people." And that the American people may not forget us, we are coming, if all be well, in the next autumn. We shall return full of hope and anticipation, and to our friends at home we shall say that we are returning for a parting embrace — a six months' embrace — and I am sure that our dear land, which has the first place in our hearts, will not begrudge us the affection which we bear to America, which out of the depths of your kindness you have conjured up. Ladies and gentlemen, I respectfully, gratefully, and, if I may say it, lovingly, wish you good-bye.





XIII

1884

THE RETURN WAVE.

NOVEMBER 11th, 1884.—Mr. Irving, Miss Ellen Terry, and the London Lyceum Theatre company appeared at the Star Theatre last night in Shakespeare's beautiful comedy of "The Merchant of Venice." The applause which attended the first entrance of *Portia* was marked by that chivalric and affectionate cordiality which ever should and ever does attest the presence of a true favourite; and the subsequent greeting to *Shylock* was a tumult of enthusiasm. Occasions of this kind are made memorable in this way—when to a noble artistic effort the public response is no less adequate than genuine; and they are long and proudly cherished in the play-goer's memory.

Upon the general character of Mr. Irving's presentation of "The Merchant of Venice" comment has already been made. The play is still treated as a comedy and not as a star piece for a tragedian, and it is mounted and dressed with a careful eye to correct detail and picturesque accessories. The presentation of the casket scenes in full, the restoration of *Shylock's* scene with *Antonio* and the *Jailer*, and

the restoration of *Portia's* words and conduct subsequent to the trial, together with the tender and romantic love-scene of *Lorenzo* and *Jessica*, are still prominent among the chief beauties of this revival. The deft introduction of oriental music, of a sonorous and barbaric strain, to signalise the proceedings of the *Prince of Morocco*, is still to be noted as an attendant charm. The maskers of Venice still glide, in their noiseless gondolas, along her silent and gloomy canals. *Shylock*, as played by Mr. Irving, still inspires anxious dread and painful suspense by his formidable return across the vacant bridge to the dwelling left desolate by his fugitive daughter. The picture of the high court of Venice is still made opulent, imposing, and real by fresco and drapery, by guards and groups, by stately ceremonials, by a deft employment of pages within and a mob without, and by correctness of dramatic treatment. And still, to crown the pageant with a golden light of happiness, the glittering but gentle mirth of *Portia* is made to play—as Shakespeare meant it should play—through an atmosphere of woman-like tenderness and unstinted hospitality, over a closing scene of summer luxury and princely wealth.

The scenery has been refreshed. Beneath it all may be discerned the instinct that aims at completeness in the display of a subject as well as in pictorial embellishment. Judges who do not heartily like the acting of Henry Irving—who deny that he possesses dramatic genius, and affirm that he is a clever schemer in theatrical art—have been known to place a marked emphasis upon his skill and thorough-going care in the management of the stage. No sagacious observer, however, is misled by this amiable subterfuge. It is easy to put an

undue stress upon this element in Mr. Irving's work. Nobody who has known him long as a public man will doubt either his diplomatic tact, his worldly wisdom, or his resolute purpose to succeed, any more than the poetic glamour of his intellect and the force of his splendid talent and discretion in the treatment of plays. But Mr. Irving is, first of all, an actor. Several of his best successes in London were gained without especial attention to stage embellishment or the adroit illustration of dramatic points. The particulars in which his achievements as a stage manager have usually and notably surpassed those of his predecessors and contemporaries are a felicitous mellowness and harmony of colour in scenery, and a resolute and almost invariably successful subordination of details to a central purpose, clearly defined and steadily pursued. There were heroes, however, before Agamemnon. Other men have presented plays as magnificently as Mr. Irving has presented them — if not always with as fine precision or perfection of charm. The Shakesperean revivals made in London by Macready, by Charles Kean, and by Samuel Phelps, and those likewise made in America by W. E. Burton, Thomas Barry, Edwin Booth, Lester Wallack, and Augustin Daly should not be forgotten. That field had long been abandoned in the British capital when Mr. Irving arose to occupy it, and it had been considerably neglected here for a long period antecedent to his arrival in America. He was fortunate when he entered upon it, no less than wise. It is a field in which several of the old leaders of the stage have laboured with zeal, liberality, and honour. Mr. Irving has done splendid things in carrying on a good work

in this respect. But it is not upon his "staging" of plays, either wholly or mainly, that his title to renown should be supposed to rest. More has been claimed for him, as to this, than he has ever claimed for himself.

It is as an actor that Mr. Irving ought, first of all and most of all, to be considered. As such he is one of the most remarkable men of this age. Several of his impersonations, pending the disclosure of new efforts, are now to be repeated, and the first that rears his head is *Shylock*. Persons who have seen in this character Edwin Forrest, Gustavus V. Brooke, James W. Wallack, E. L. Davenport, Bogumil Dawison, Lawrence Barrett, and Edwin Booth, are not likely to be transported by the representation of it that is given by Mr. Irving. His performance, no doubt, is truthful in ideal, and flexible and often splendidly potent in execution. Yet this is not one of the characters in which he stands alone. He presents, indeed, a consistent and symmetrical identity. He makes *Shylock* the incarnation—at first specious, then obvious—of infernal malignity. He depicts a Jew who hates his victim for being a Christian, but more for being a foe to usury. He shows a savage,—and yet he steadily preserves in him the strain of human nature, making him resentful of injuries; logical, fervent, and sincere in his own justification; domestic in his habits; reminiscent of a lost love, and that in a tone of true passion and tender grief; and he sets forth, in the indubitable form and colour of nature, a huge and horrid type of implacable animosity. Nothing could be more significant of a comprehension of *Shylock's* nature, and nothing could be finer as dramatic art, than

Mr. Irving's cold, wolfish glare and his demeanour of indomitable purpose in confronting the merchant in the court. But the manifestation of tremendous emotional power that is possible in *Shylock*, particularly in the street scene, Mr. Irving does not accomplish—and, in fact, does not attempt. The legend of Edmund Kean in this character—a presence meteoric, lurid, and terrible—is not realised; and this overwhelming personality is what in *Shylock* seems ever most essential. This part does not and can not call forth what is finest and best in this actor's nature. Those characters in which Mr. Irving is distinctive or supreme are men in whom imagination, weirdness, and pathos are the prevailing attributes.

Miss Terry gave her beautiful embodiment of *Portia*, in which the elocution is a luxury to hear, and in which a sympathetic perception of what is most endearing in a woman's nature—loveliness, goodness, and fidelity—is commingled with an arch merriment and an occasional tenderness delightful to see and feel. Mr. George Alexander appeared as *Bassanio*, Mr. Tyars as *Morocco*, and Miss Emery as *Jessica*. Mr. Alexander revealed a manly spirit, intelligence and refinement, and seemed to be neither self-conscious nor self-assertive.





XIV

POETRY OF STAGE EFFECT.

NOVEMBER 14th.—Side by side the currents of happiness and misery, sometimes blended, more often contrasted, flow on together in the experience of human creatures, so that no work of art can be so dramatic as is the grand, comprehensive picture of human life itself. In deep and thoughtful natures a perception of the contrasts afforded in the vast picture naturally engenders a grave and sweet tranquility, a mournful but noble power of self-abnegation, and, where the dramatic instinct is present, a capacity to view life as nature shows it, in all its diversified aspects, simply as a fact, and without comment whether upon the hopes or fears, the joys or griefs, the gains or losses which are inevitable in the fate of mankind. This was Shakespeare's method; and thus in such a comedy as "Much Ado" the observer sees the procession of human events much as he might behold the bend in a distant river—partly in sunshine, partly in shadow, but not perceiving either whence it springs or whither it flows. The silvery waters have passed through unseen woods and meadows, and they will flow through other unseen

fields, to empty themselves into the distant, unknown sea. Just so, in one of Shakespeare's comedies, the observer feels that the current of life which has now come into view has been steadily flowing down to this point of sight, and will continue to flow on, long after it has passed from the range of his vision.

In Mr. Irving's treatment of the play—in his setting and embellishment of it—the leading characteristic is the practical perception of this truth. The performance of "*Much Ado*" which has again been given is not now to be viewed as a novelty. Yet it cannot be amiss to refer to the intellectual exaltation, the impressiveness, the atmosphere of commingled sadness and mirth with which the comedy was displayed. The sight of it is like a glimpse into a land of sunshine, love, and pleasure; and when, at last, its happy denizens dance away to the sound of merry music you turn from it with a smile which hardly conceals a tear, thinking that still in some happy region, far from the troubles and cares of this world, their life of merriment, passion, romance, and happiness is still flowing on, immortal in its youth and beauty. To create and to leave impressions of this kind has been the object of Mr. Irving's art; and the brilliant accomplishment of this object is the basis of his renown.

Mr. Irving appeared as *Benedick*, Miss Ellen Terry as *Beatrice*, Miss Winifred Emery as *Hero*, Mr. Alexander as the *Prince*, Mr. Norman Forbes as *Claudio*, and Mr. Johnson as *Dogberry*. It remains a truth that Mr. Irving and Miss Terry have construed *Benedick* and *Beatrice* in an ideal spirit, making them higher and finer than they are in the book; and now, as before, the result justifies the expedient. There is no animal taint

in the *Benedick* of Mr. Irving; there is not a trace of the shrew in the *Beatrice* of Miss Terry. For its feminine charm, for that indefinable something which makes a woman the object at once of chivalrous passion and tender respect, it will be remembered as long as anything is remembered on the stage of our time. Mr. Irving's quiet, ruminant, sagacious drollery, playing over a serious solidity of intellectual character, was exerted in a charming manner. In the challenge to *Claudio* he rises to true dignity, and he does not make the common mistake of turning dangerous menace into tragical bombast. The stickler for the old line of treatment in *Benedick*—which makes him a dashing soldier, a rattling man-of-the-world, and a not over-delicate gallant—will reject this performance. It nevertheless is one of exalted beauty in ideal, and of precision, firmness, and balance in execution.

Mr. George Alexander's preservation of an unobtrusively considerate tone toward others, combined with freedom from anxiety on the subject of rank, making the essence of good breeding, his breezy good humour, and his simplicity, in the character of *Don Pedro*, were observed with admiration. The scene of the interrupted bridal, in the ancient church of Messina, crystallised into itself the chief beauties of the performance. Such a scene is at once a perfect pleasure and a noble example in the dramatic art.





XV

TWELFTH NIGHT.

NOVEMBER 19th.—There is an uncertainty of dramatic drift in the comedy of the “Twelfth Night”—a kind of whimsical recklessness, sufficiently denoted in the sub-title, “What You Will”—which, in practical experience, has generally had the effect of making this piece a little tiresome upon the stage. Nobody can care much for anything that it contains, aside from the gentle, piquant, lovely character of *Viola*; and the charm of this is not essentially dramatic, but resides almost exclusively in the delicious sweetness of her temperament as displayed under the mournful light of her patient and outwardly cheerful resignation to the pangs of unrequited love. There is but little dramatic incident in her experience or of dramatic effect in the development of either her story or her character. The love-lorn *Orsino*—a gentleman far too easily reconciled to the loss of one love, so that at last he may obtain another—is almost insipid. The episode of *Sir Toby* and *Sir Andrew* is little more than a tipsy frolic. *Malvolio*, though strong and complex as a character, interests rather as a curiously carved and

grotesque image of humanity than as a typical man : he amuses and he stimulates analytic reflection upon the possible oddities of human nature, but he does not awaken sympathy. The discomfiture of "an affectioned ass" and "contemplative fool" is a comic spectacle, and yet the laughter to which it incites is rebuked by a kind of humane regret that any man should be so absurd, and should, in his infinity of conceit, encounter such cruel treatment. As often as the "Twelfth Night" has been seen here (and it has been seen often since the old days of Burton), it has proved a trial to patience, except for two or three impressive beauties. Mr. Irving's revival of it, although distinguished by rare beauty of scenery and fidelity of detail in dress and "business," met with the usual fortune of calm respect. Its chief features were Miss Ellen Terry as *Viola* and Mr. Irving as *Malvolio*—the latter being the first embodiment of this eccentric person seen here of late years, or since the time of Walcott and Gilbert in the character, that has made him an actual human creature, capable of feeling passion and of suffering pain as well as of causing mirth and pointing a moral. Mr. Irving presented him with distinctness and firm execution, and with a wealth of subtle mechanism. Miss Terry in *Viola* was a beautiful image of boy-like grace, and she delivered the text with a fine intelligence that penetrated and illumined every line. But her performance had little of that half-concealed sadness which, mingled with *Viola's* glee, makes her pathetic as well as bewitching. Sweet without insipidity and gay without coquetry, *Viola* is the most piquant female character in Shakespeare, and, excepting *Imogen*, the most tender and delicious

of his women. She is true but not intense; ardent but not powerful. She loves and she suffers; but she is bright, gentle, and submissive, and she typifies neither misery nor passion. Shakespeare's lapses from verse into prose are always significant because always made to serve a purpose in the art of acting; and it is notable that he seldom allows *Viola* to speak aught else than the language of poetry. She is a rarefied character, slighter alike in mind and will than *Rosalind*, though kindred with that luxuriant, sparkling beauty, but equally affectionate and noble, and more lovely. There is not much of the character, but it is as precious as diamonds. The chief dramatic necessity in the acting of *Viola* would seem to be the revelation of her wistful sadness, her rueful, charming melancholy, under the repose of innocent glee—the half-checked tear that is momentarily visible through the guileless, patient, unselfish, eager smile of childlike happiness. Miss Terry's expeditious treatment of the part gave such emphasis to its brilliancy as quite concealed its sorrow. But, while deficient in the transparency of acting, it was a delightful image of gladness, sweetness, and beauty.





XVI

HAMLET.

NOVEMBER 27th.—Mr. Irving has crowned his noble series of performances in this capital with his original, extraordinary, and deeply impressive impersonation of *Hamlet*. This was given last night before a numerous audience, enthusiastic but also thoughtful; and it was viewed with eager attention, sometimes with surprise, sometimes with delight, once in a while with consternation, more often with cordial plaudits, always with profound respect. Miss Ellen Terry appeared as *Ophelia*, and she dignified and adorned the occasion by a performance so radiant in beauty, so exquisite in grace, and so tender and lovely in pathos that simply “it paragoned description and wild fame.” The sublime tragedy of “*Hamlet*” was set upon the stage in scenery remarkable for the rich quality of its sombre tone, and its several characters, judiciously distributed to suitable actors, were, with little exception, personated in a competent and effective manner. The night was a golden one, and it will long abide in the pleased and grateful remembrance of this community.

The character of *Hamlet* appears to be chosen, by common consent, as furnishing the standard by which every actor should be judged, with reference to his claim to a place in the front rank of the dramatic profession. It is not, indeed, so difficult a part to act as either *Macbeth* or *King Lear*—since it requires neither the lurid, overwhelming imagination of the fiend-driven murderer, nor the vast torrent of thwarted tenderness and shattered senile sensibility essential to the afflicted, insane monarch; neither does it exact such prodigious physical resource and exertion as are demanded in these characters. But it is a majestic and beautiful personality, richly fraught with intellect, sensibility, refinement, and grace, and displayed under circumstances of impressive mystery and romance; its thoroughly adequate representation is possible only to a nature of exquisite sensibility, hallowed by the charm of genius, matured by the experience of suffering, and dominated by an intellect that perfectly controls alike itself and the methods, expedients, and accomplishments of dramatic art; and hence it is reasoned that the actor who can endear himself to the world in the character of *Hamlet* is necessarily a great actor. In England, where they accept a new *Hamlet* about once every twenty years, and where the mantle of Garrick has fallen, successively, on Kemble, Kean, Young, Macready, and Fechter, Mr. Irving's embodiment of *Hamlet* was long since crowned with the laurel of renown. He has now placed this noble work for the first time before the public of New-York, and so at length the corner-stone of his great reputation stands fully disclosed.

The performance is one of the richest and most suggestive that have been presented on the contemporary

stage, and one of the most difficult to analyse and describe. In ideal — in fidelity to Shakespeare's conception — it is almost entirely great. The proportion, indeed, is not strictly maintained. Certain attributes of the character are more amply, boldly, and truly presented than others. The feeling exceeds the mentality. The bitterness is more prominent than the charm. Of that lucid interval of lofty poise — that *Hamlet* who shines forth in the speech, to *Horatio*, about "passion's slave" and "fortune's finger" — there is scarcely a trace. But the *Hamlet* who looked into *Ophelia's* eyes as if he would read her very soul; the *Hamlet* who seemed to her "like sweet bells jangled, out of tune and harsh"; the *Hamlet* who thought he could be bounded in a nutshell and count himself king of infinite space, but that he had bad dreams; the *Hamlet* through the temple of whose soul streamed a hideous rout of foul and frightful shapes; the *Hamlet* who said "You would not think how ill all's here, about my heart" — this is thought, felt, understood, and interpreted with profound earnestness and remarkable beauty. And this is enough. The blemishes will not invalidate this. They are in the method and not in the substance. Yet they exist: for Mr. Irving has applied to *Hamlet* the same "natural" treatment and the same colloquial style that he employs for *Mathias* in "The Bells." They are, in that character, consummate; but they sometimes seemed enfeebled and inadequate, in contact with the towering magnitude of Shakespeare's thought and the stately pomp and sonority of his verse. Mr. Irving's *Hamlet* is great in ideal; but his expression of that ideal could be made, in some ways, more massive and more splendid. It is upon

the substance, and not the manner, of the work, accordingly, that reflection will first repose and longest dwell.

The universal tendency of the human mind is to summarise. Almost every person likes to hear, and likes to make, comprehensive and positive statements upon all subjects of knowledge or thought. Hundreds of writers — pursuant to this usual impulse — have assumed to define *Hamlet*. No writer has entirely succeeded in doing it. There are subjects that cannot be summarised, and this is one of them. Much lucid and splendid thought upon it has been uttered, because many of the greatest minds which have existed within the last two hundred years have been attracted, aroused and inspired by its glory and its mystery. But the final elucidating word has never yet been found. Much, to be sure, is clear. There can be no doubt about the general drift. But what was left a secret remains a secret still. When the human soul and its relations to the universe are entirely understood, *Hamlet* will be entirely understood — and not till then.

Without presuming to undertake to define *Hamlet*, however, it may yet be said that certain illuminative facts about him are positively known. He is a prince, in a royal court; noble, gentle, and of perfect breeding; “the expectancy and rose of the fair state.” He is thirty years old. He has been educated at the most famous university in Europe. He has been reared in the Catholic faith. He has lived a life, not of action but of thought. His intellect, vast, far-reaching, and conscious of its power, has been cultivated, by intense thinking, to the most extreme limit, so that now the idea of anything — no matter what — is more real to him

than the thing itself; and he has lost the faculty, if ever he had it, of practical, continuous action, even while living at the height of mental activity and in a fever of destructive excitement. It seems to have been Shakespeare's intention to present a divinely gifted man, as representative of all that is highest and best in human nature; to place him at the pinnacle of worldly fortune; to make him great in himself and in his state; to give him honour, genius, love, friendship, power, wealth, popularity, every blessing; and then to overwhelm him with affliction, developing a latent strain of misery and taint of madness in his organisation, and thus, on the largest canvas and with the boldest colours ever used by mortal hand, to paint human life in the aspect of total failure.

For this, surely, is what the tragedy of "Hamlet" seems to say. However much mankind may close its eyes to the truth, the truth nevertheless remains, that mortality is a condition not of happiness but of sorrow. The protracted and cruel pain with which it begins, the uncertainty with which it is attended, the trouble with which it is burdened, the mystery with which it is surrounded, the mutability with which it is cursed, and the misery in which it ends unite to make it, for all who look beneath the surface, infinitely pathetic. Some of its pleasures, indeed, are very great; but all of them are evanescent. Everything breaks and dies—everything but memory, and that is the cruelest affliction of all. Poor Byron said the whole sad truth in four lines:

"Count o'er the joys thine hours have seen,
Count o'er thy days from anguish free,
And know, whatever thou hast been,
'Tis something better not to be."

All this is implied in Mr. Irving's impersonation. He never misses the subtlety of the character. The misery of *Hamlet* is inherent misery. It is not, to any considerable extent, caused by his personal circumstances. "The uses of this world" are to him "weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable" long before he knows that his father was murdered, or that his mother's new husband is the murderer, or that his father's spirit is abroad. Grief at the death of his father, bitter resentment of his mother's ensuing hasty nuptials, dim suspicion of his uncle's wickedness, and presentiment and foreboding as to the love of *Ophelia* are the only sources of his wretchedness that can be distinctly stated. These are in part explanatory of his condition; but only in part. For the secret, profound cause of the overwhelming weight of his misery we must look into his soul. Self-disgust and disgust at the human race are properties of his mind. A sense of the awful grandeur and mystery of the universe and of the angelic and even godlike attributes that appertain to the nature of man abide with him, it is true; yet as he looks forth upon that universe he sees only "a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours"; and as he looks upon mankind he sees only the "quintessence of dust." Suicide has long been a familiar subject in his thoughts, and he would destroy his own life but that self-murder is forbidden, and — more important still — but that greater misery may await the soul, beyond the grave, than that which it suffers here.

Hamlet is the very genius of sorrow; born so, and not made so; and whatever his circumstances might have been he would have reacted on them to affliction if not to tragical results. Upon this nature, thus

saturated with gloom and predestined to anguish, falls the shock of a supernatural visitation and a heartrending disclosure of cruel and loathsome crime; and thus the will, already irresolute from baffled thinking and enfeebling grief, is shattered; the mind drifts from its moorings, and steadfast action becomes impossible. *Hamlet* is in a real delirium—to which Mr. Irving gives prominent and thrilling expression—after the disappearance of the *Ghost*, in the scene upon “the dreadful summit of the cliff”; and he then has the impulse to assume to be insane (in which device it is singular and significant to note that the *Ghost* appears to concur), because he is already deranged, and feels it, and wishes, in a certain blind way, to conceal it. He has no plan in his madness. Whenever there is an opportunity to act he will reason it away. He does not really wish to plunge the soul of *Claudius* into hell; but he can persuade himself to think, for the moment, that even this is needful, in order to free himself from the necessity of killing him, then and there, in the prayer scene. He can feel no personal experience without presently making it into a generalisation. This shattered condition—this incertitude—this desolate, drifting plight—is thoroughly realised in Mr. Irving’s embodiment; and this is *Hamlet*.

Charles Knight’s theory, that the play commonly referred to as “the old Hamlet” was, in fact, Shakespeare’s “Hamlet” as it stood when first written (probably in 1589), and as it stands in the quarto piratically published in 1603, is a sagacious theory. The first authentic draft is the quarto of 1604; and—as readers doubtless know—it is from a comparison of this, and of the folio print of 1623, with the pirat-

ical copy, that Shakespeare scholars gain a peculiar knowledge of the astonishing growth of Shakespeare's mind, and, especially, derive instruction as to his drift in this tragedy. This drift was far more definitely expressed at first, but in a manner far less poetical, philosophical, eloquent, and profound. Great emphasis was laid on the madness of *Hamlet*. The *Queen* was distinctly declared to be innocent of complicity in the murder of her first husband. *Hamlet* himself was made more comprehensible every way—being less heavily freighted with the “large discourse of reason, looking before and after,” less reflective upon mankind, and, especially, less interpenetrated with embittering sorrow. The lesson learned from this research, as applied to the acting of *Hamlet*, is that the character should be deduced from the play as it stands in its mature form; that, while the Prince must be presented as a man whose soul and body are steeped in hopeless misery, and who is sustained by proud, scornful, bitter, incessant, feverish, intellectual power,—the restless, terrible excitement of a great brain and heart surcharged with irremediable woe,—he must yet be presented with a certain vagueness. It is a great excellence of Mr. Irving's embodiment of *Hamlet* that it so presents him.

Observant persons who have ever heard Mr. Irving's recital of Hood's poem of “The Dream of Eugene Aram” had then a rare opportunity of studying his peculiar method of execution—which again forces itself upon attention in his performance of *Hamlet*. He begins with repose. His level speaking is clear, measured, even, precise, and always steadily effective. Soon his nervous forces become excited; the imagina-

tion, working upon the feelings, throws the whole system into a tremor of emotion; and thereupon both his walk and his enunciation are, in a peculiar way (peculiar and not disagreeable), constricted, in some slight degree, by a sort of inflexibility. He now moves a little stiffly; his words are spoken with monosyllabic ejaculation, and with an occasional cadence. At moments his tone is indistinct. The character and the feeling have obtained control of the man, and his intellectual will is forcing the man to become representative and expressive of them. If the character and the feeling be weird, grimly grotesque, or afflictively passionate, the intellectual will of the actor splendidly predominates over all his functions and makes him superlatively true and touchingly sympathetic. If the character and the feeling be stately, spiritualised, classical, philosophic, expressed within the formalism and inflexible lines of verse, and exacting of a body in which absolute symmetry is to be shown with absolute grace, the emotion of the actor responds less readily to his will, or does not yield at all, but carries all before it; and that which ought to be perfect in form and held in supreme poise with the iron grip of intellectual power is shattered and diffused, like a coruscation of ever-changing fires; and the eye knows not where to rest. This is shown in his embodiment of *Hamlet*, and this is why so many students of the work constantly speak of single features in it and not of the work as a whole. There are parts of *Hamlet* to which Mr. Irving's temperament and method are exactly fitted. No actor was ever truer or finer than he in denotement of the blending of assumed madness with involuntary derangement—the forlorn

state of a wild, unsettled mind, protecting itself by simulated wildness. No actor ever better expressed the bitterness and sarcasm of a sweet nature, outraged, shocked, and turned back upon itself. In the play scene, in the ensuing colloquy with the two spaniel courtiers, as in the first talk with them, and in the last ghost scene, Mr. Irving's *Hamlet* is at its best; and its best is exceedingly beautiful. There was not a perfect correspondence between the actor's ideal of Shakespeare's conception and the actor's faculties of expressing it. There are defects of execution. But viewed as an ideal Mr. Irving's *Hamlet* is profoundly true on the side of the emotions; rightly saturated with sorrow; touched with glittering scorn and pathetic bitterness; tainted, as in Shakespeare's page, with the morbid tinge of mental disease; and, above all, and in spite of irregularities of form and excess of impulse over will, it is fused by passionate intensity into one continuous, fluent strain of vital personification.

Abstractly considered, however, what does it signify whether *Hamlet* is a character who feigns madness, or who really is mad? whether *Hamlet* loves *Ophelia*, or has ceased to love her? whether *Hamlet* has really seen his dead father's spirit, or a devil in that shape, or has imagined a vocal apparition that he never saw at all? whether his mother was privy to the murder of her husband, or guiltless of participation in that hideous crime? What signify any or all questions about the matter — unless the experience of *Hamlet* be viewed as something germane to the experience of every individual of the human race? If nothing more is to be considered than cleverness in acting — the adroit treatment of mooted points — sonority in soliloquies — flexibility

in dialogue — grace or wildness of demeanour — felicity of stage-business — taste in dress — we may as well descant on the soap bubbles that a child blows from its pipe, at the nursery window. The important thing is to grasp *Hamlet's* experience as a whole, to absorb it into our knowledge, to bring it home to our own hearts; and surely the actor who enables us to accomplish this result, or who largely helps us toward it, has succeeded in *Hamlet*, no matter what, to individual taste, may be the defects of his technical mechanism. The execution, to be sure, is the art of acting. Drama being, first of all, for the eye, it is not so much what you do as how you do it that is your potent element of victory. Signor Salvini's embodiment of *Othello*, for example, is a great piece of acting, and one that exercises a prodigious power over an audience, although to a considerable extent it is a demonstrable perversion of Shakespeare. Mrs. Pritchard was esteemed, in the eighteenth century, a wonderful actress of *Lady Macbeth*, although she had never read the tragedy of "Macbeth," but only knew the part that she had to act; and Dr. Johnson called her an "inspired idiot." Her ideal may have been wrong; her execution, obviously, was magnificent. No thinker will deny or undervalue the prodigious influence of the art of expression in these matters. Yet what you do is also of great importance. In the last analysis of the subject, looking toward what remains with the spectator of a dramatic performance, it, indeed, transcends all the rest, being an element of permanent worth and an abiding result. A man who acts greatly is, doubtless, a great actor, without reference to what it is that his acting is specifically designed to exhibit; but the man who acts a great part, like *Hamlet*, so as to put us into posses-

sion of it, has accomplished more, and risen to a higher intellectual station, than is possible to even the most perfect executant. This is Mr. Irving's victory — and it is a brilliant one ; unequivocal ; permanent ; not to be denied ; and safe beyond the reach of disparagement.

The character of *Ophelia*, when first it dawns upon the apprehension of a reader of the tragedy of “*Hamlet*,” appears to be all that is lovely. Its lack of strength is not perceived until the observer reflects that strength also is an element of loveliness in woman. *Ophelia* is exquisitely beautiful, soft, innocent, trustful, and fond. She loves with her whole heart — but her heart is neither resolute nor passionate. She instantly yields to the first touch of opposition and she is broken by the first blow of adversity. That blow, indeed, it must be admitted, is a heavy one — for it is her affrighted perception of what, in *Hamlet*, her lover, she can regard only as madness. Her description, to *Polonius*, of the visitation that she has received from the Prince is surely one of the most significant passages in the tragedy, with reference both to herself and him. *Hamlet* uses no guile with *Ophelia*. To others he may put on “an antic disposition” ; to her he is himself. And the meaning of that deplorable spectacle is that, with everything else that has suffered shipwreck in the life of *Hamlet*, love also is destroyed and henceforth will exist only as a memory — now passionate, now meekly and mutely woful, but always agonising and bitter : for *Hamlet's* gaze has pierced through the loveliness of *Ophelia* to the frailness beneath it, and beneath all loveliness, and he knows that for him there is no dependence on a woman's heart and no refuge in love. His mind, in receiving its consecration to vengeance,

has likewise received its death-blow from the spiritual world. *Ophelia*, incapable at any time of fully understanding *Hamlet*, does understand that his mind is distracted and that his love is dead; and this, doubtless, is the beginning of her own mental derangement, subsequently developed by the cruelty of *Hamlet's* rebuke and by the calamitous death of her father, slain by her frantic lover's hand. *Ophelia*, then, is an image or personification of innocent, delicious, feminine youth and beauty, and she passes before us in the two phases of sanity and delirium. Miss Ellen Terry presented her in this way. The embodiment is fully within her reach, and it is one of the few unmistakably perfect creations with which dramatic art has illumined literature and adorned the stage. Miss Terry was born to play such a part and she is perfect in it. There is no other word for such an achievement.





XVII

CLOSING SCENES.

DECEMBER 7th.—Mr. Irving's engagement, which began on November 10th, was ended last night. It has filled a period of four weeks and it has been prosperous to the actor and advantageous to the public. The pieces presented were, with two exceptions, those in which Mr. Irving and Miss Terry had been seen before. The novelties were "Twelfth Night" and "Hamlet," Mr. Irving presenting *Malvolio* and *Hamlet*, and Miss Terry presenting *Viola* and *Ophelia*. Mr. Wills's drama of "Charles I." had a single representation. The attendance throughout Mr. Irving's four weeks has been large. The several plays produced by him have been set upon the stage in a careful manner and with as much correctness in dresses and scenery as is ever desirable in these matters. Mr. Irving has had the sagacity to employ scenic artists of the highest order, and to enlist the services of a stage manager (Mr. H. J. Loveday) of ripe experience and great and peculiar talent and energy; but it would be a mistake to suppose that Mr. Irving's renown rests upon stage pictures or stage management. To the illumination of the plays

by adroit devices of treatment he has given thoughtful and thorough attention ; but it is as an actor that he has made his fame. Comment upon his recent performance of *Hamlet* has already been as far enlarged as is desirable ; but that performance, for example, whatever may be its blemishes of elocution or its questionable expedients of stage business, would suffice to show him possessed of the intuition of genius. It has aroused controversy. Mr. Irving's personal peculiarities invariably do that—for even when he is walking quite in the beaten track they are so marked and singular that they distract and perplex the general observation. But adverse criticism of Mr. Irving's acting, such as is warranted by justice, amounts simply to this—that his physical means of expression are, in certain respects, distinctly limited, and that his temperament, face, person, and individual demeanour make him unfit for some characters, and less suitable for some than for others. Yet he is a great actor, and his performance of *Hamlet* would alone suffice to prove it.

His version of the tragedy, indeed, is not as well made as it might be. He has restored certain essential passages—such as the delirious speeches of *Hamlet*, toward the end of Act I., which are more often omitted than used—the usually omitted parts of *Hamlet's* dialogue with the courtiers, and certain bits in the play scene ; but he has dropped *Ophelia's* account of *Hamlet's* dishevelment, and the whole of the first scene of the fourth act, together with various lines, here and there, in the text of the different minor characters. There is much of “Hamlet” that has to be cut, imperatively ; but a scrupulous observer of these matters would like to see the excisions made with purpose

and never with caprice. Mr. Irving does not use the portraits, but he does make use of "tablets." There are various other points of this sort that could be noted and questioned; and it is certain that Mr. Irving is defective as a speaker of blank verse. But when all is said the fact remains that the actor has shown a great ideal of *Hamlet*, and that his execution has, in many ways, matched with his ideal. Miss Ellen Terry's finest success has been made in *Ophelia*. The rare beauty of this performance eludes description. It is the embodiment of a broken-hearted, distracted woman; but the woman is one of extraordinary loveliness in her original nature, and the touch of frenzy only seemed to invest her with spiritual radiance. The execution was as free as a summer wind.

Mr. Irving's *Malvolio* is the best that has been seen in recent years. It was easy to see that he had got inside of this character. The formalism of *Malvolio*, his scrupulous cleanliness, his precise demeanour, his constitutional habit of routine, his inordinate self-complacency,—over which, nevertheless, his judgment keeps a kind of watch,—his sensitiveness of self-love, his condition of being real in all that he feels and suffers,—these attributes Mr. Irving combined into a distinct and rounded personality, of which the humour is—as it should be—wholly unconscious. His sustained preservation of the identity was especially impressive, and he was most characteristic in his dry, distinctly articulated, unconsciously pompous delivery of the text. One notable incident in the revival of "Twelfth Night" was a dashing, sparkling, gleeful performance of *Maria* by Miss Payne. Mr. George Alexander, appearing as *Orsino*, gained distinction for dignity of manner and

for delicacy and sweetness in the delivery of the Duke's impassioned speeches. In the revival of "Charles I." Mr. Irving and Miss Terry repeated their artistic success of an earlier time. This play is a series of pictures, and is deficient of dramatic action; but it does present character, and it contains situations that affect the heart. The intense earnestness of Mr. Irving's nature is conspicuously shown in his power to invest the character of *Charles I.* with unflagging sincerity, and to sustain it, before the imagination, in nobility and pathos. Innate aristocracy never had a better emblem than this performance. Self-concentration and high-bred reserve are maintained, even through a most afflicting scene of farewell, to the pathetic "remember" with which this sad figure passes out of view—to live forever in tender remembrance. A strong feature of this revival was Mr. Howe's impersonation of *Lord Huntley*—a manly, tender, rugged, simple, and discreet piece of work. It seemed as if the old knight had come to life out of Scott's "Woodstock."

The final performance presented "The Bells," in which Mr. Irving, as *Mathias*, is seen in the full vigour of his imagination. He had a great house and an affectionate greeting of farewell. This was his closing address:

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN: I wish I could tell you in the simplest phrase how deeply we are indebted for a renewal of that generous welcome which we received during our first visit to America. It is difficult on such an occasion as this to express what is in one's heart, without running the risk of seeming fulsome on the one hand or indifferent on the other. But this I can tell you, that our third visit to New-York, which ends to-night, has been—if I may say so—more

gratifying than our first; for it has proved that we have a place in your esteem—a place which will be remembered and cherished by me as long as I live. You doubtless have heard, and will hear, many strange and odd fictions about our humble selves, but you will never hear too deep an expression of our appreciation of the infinite kindness which we have received at your hands; and that feeling is echoed by a dear friend and fellow-worker of mine,—a friend who holds so enviable a sway over your hearts,—Miss Ellen Terry. Ladies and gentlemen, we shall once again have the pleasure and privilege of appearing before you, next March, and then, as actors, we must take a last and long farewell. On this subject I shall not dwell,—sufficient to the day is the pain thereof,—but look forward to our next meeting, assuring you that my colleagues are as sensible as I am of the courtesy, the welcome, and the generous good-will which we have received at your hands, and the remembrance of it will ever bring happiness to our hearts.





XVIII

THE INFLUENCE OF THE STAGE.

THE assailants of the stage, who are mostly representatives of the church, seem to believe that their fulminations are potent and effective. Yet the stage continues to grow in wealth, power, and public consideration. An impartial observer might well be amused at the fatuity with which these strenuous censors oppose the clamour of assertion to the inexorable logic of facts. If the stage were really an immoral institution it would not enjoy the favour of any save the depraved; whereas, in fact, it has the approval of the majority — and the majority of the community is moral. Putting religion out of the question, there is a power in the affections, in the bond of family, in reverence for the hearth-stone of home, which, by itself, insures the coherence of a virtuous society, and would make a radically corrupt stage impossible. The reason that the charge of immorality against the stage has failed is simply that the charge is false, and that right-thinking persons know it to be so.

Both stage and church have been used as cloaks for vice, but that is the fault of evil-doers and not of the

institutions themselves. There have been profligate actors, and there have been profligate clergymen ; and there is reason for surprise at the forbearance of the stage toward the church, considering the animosity so often exhibited by the latter. It is not long since a minister of Christ publicly stigmatised an actress, by name, as being "as vile a hag as the sewers of Paris ever spewed into the state-room of an Atlantic steam-ship." This is the kind of provocation that the pulpit gives, and this is the kind of language that clergymen too often use. It is needless to remark that no man who is not a clergyman would ever dream of applying such words to a woman. No respectable actor would ever speak in that way of even the most vituperative assailant of his profession. The stage seldom or never strikes back. At long intervals, to be sure, an actor plays Aminadab Sleek, or Mr. Chadband ; but even then the shaft of satire is directed against sanctimonious hypocrisy, which Christ himself rebuked. The stage does not attack religion or virtue.

It is true that the stage does not aim to teach Christianity. But neither does it aim to teach the differential calculus. There is a place for everything. Christian ethics on the stage would be as inappropriate as Mr. Owens's *Solon Shingle* in the pulpit. The legitimate purpose of acting has been specified by Shakespeare in language that no writer can improve and that no reader needs to see quoted. The worst mistake ever made by the stage and the most offensive attitude ever assumed by it are seen when, as in "Camille" and two or three similar plays, it tries to deal with what is really the function of the church,—the consequence

of sin in the human soul. Here it makes a disastrous and mournful failure.

There is no need to discuss the state of the stage as it was in the time of Charles II. and John Dryden. All thinkers agree as to that. It was vile. The attack upon it began promptly. Jeremy Collier's onslaught was made in 1698, and it was made with good reason and great force; and a reform of the stage almost immediately ensued. Cibber, Dogget, and Wilks, when they obtained the Drury Lane patent [1714], at once effected many desirable improvements. Later still, Thomas Sheridan, in Dublin, and David Garrick, in London, were especially commended for their salutary and effective measures for the purification of the theatre. It did not become a Sunday-school, but it was improved; and it has kept pace with the moral tone of society ever since. There have, indeed, been several serious abuses—spurts of indelicate spectacle and of wanton French opera. But these are the excrescences of the stage, and not the institution itself—the expedients of speculators, temporary, evanescent, having their little day and going out of fashion. Davenant introduced such things in England in the seventeenth century, and they have cropped out, intermittently, ever since, with reënforcements from the French theatre. Nobody questions the viciousness of such pieces as “*La Grande Duchesse*” and “*La Belle Hélène*”; but these are not types of the genuine permanent literature which, in furnishing a vehicle for acting, has kept the stage alive. Plays like “*Grandfather Whitehead*,” the “*Willow Copse*,” and “*The Chimney Corner*” will always hold their own, when they are properly acted. “*The Hunchback*,” when Miss Mary Anderson appears

in it, always draws good houses — a merited tribute as well to a good play as to the brilliant genius and thoughtful art of a great actress. The theatre is never either much better or much worse than the community in which it exists.

To estimate the actual influence of the stage of the present day we must consider who the actors are that prosper and what plays achieve the widest and most permanent success. Edwin Booth, John McCullough, Lawrence Barrett, Joseph Jefferson, Mary Anderson, Genevieve Ward, John L. Toole, Henry Irving,—these are chief among the leaders of the stage in our day; and there is not one of them who would not be astonished at being accused of producing an immoral piece. Wallack's Theatre is the leading theatre of New-York, and the plays that have earned the most money in Wallack's Theatre are Mr. Wallack's play of "Rosedale" and Mr. Boucicault's play of "The Shaughraun." Both of them are innocent. Of Shakespeare's plays at least fourteen are in continual use, in a form beyond rational reproach.

Objection is specially made against the old comedies; but it appears to be forgotten that the old comedies do not constitute the staple of contemporary dramatic representations. In fact only a few of them are ever acted, either in England or America. The number of English plays recorded as existing at the beginning of the present century is about six thousand. How many of these survive in actual use in the theatre? Not fifty, altogether. At long intervals we may, for a few nights, see "The School for Scandal," "She Stoops to Conquer," "Wine Works Wonders," "The Road to Ruin," "The Belle's Stratagem," "The

Rivals," "The Poor Gentleman," "A Cure for the Heartache," "To Marry or not to Marry," "The Clandestine Marriage," "She Would and She Wouldn't," "The Busybody," "Wild Oats," and "The Wonder": but such performances are extremely infrequent and generally unpopular and unremunerative. Ben Jonson, Cartwright, Fletcher, Congreve, Murphy, Foote, Dibdin, Cherry, O'Keefe, Prince Hoare, Cumberland, Cibber,—all these and many more, and all of them writers of exceptional dramatic brilliancy, are practically as dead as if they never had existed. It is twenty years since "Love for Love" was last acted. "The Man of the World" died with Hackett and "The Lyar" died with Charles Mathews. When the old comedies are acted, nowadays, they are acted chiefly as curiosities, and they are invariably given in edited, altered, and pruned versions. Mr. Jefferson—surely an authority in such matters, and never found anywhere but on the side of goodness, right and true taste—uses three of them: "The Rivals," "The Poor Gentleman," and "The Heir at Law." But he expunges from them every coarse expression, and that has been his invariable custom ever since he acquired the authority to do as he liked in his profession. The few indelicate lines of "The School for Scandal" (and they are very few and unnecessary) are usually spoken. It is to be said, however, for the text of this comedy, that not a single indelicate word or allusion is written in it for the mere sake of impropriety or with the intention to corrupt. Sheridan portrays a company of scandal-mongers such as existed in his time, and he makes them talk as such; and then he rebukes and defeats them, and

covers them with ridicule and contempt. He portrays the affectation of virtue, also,—which is one of the infallible signs of a bad nature,—and he utterly overwhelms it with defeat and scorn. His morality as to trifles is seen to be careless and even indulgent. His colouring of the spendthrift is rosier than might be wished. Still, the teaching of the play is exemplary, and it exerts no hurtful influence. You cannot rebuke an evil unless you state what the evil is that you wish to rebuke. You cannot, in a play, exemplify the triumph of a hero over a rascal unless you depict both the rascal and the hero. Certain works of art, to be sure, are right in precept while wrong in spirit—because their authors may, insidiously and adroitly, aim at diffusing impurity while ostensibly inculcating moral excellence. The novels of Emile Zola, some of which have been turned into plays, have practically this effect. But such works are few and “The School for Scandal” is not one of them. Its purpose was distinctly good; and all moral scientists declare that the moral quality of an action resides in the purpose with which the action is performed. The censor would be right in ascribing an evil purpose to *Etherege* and perhaps to *Dryden*, but not in imputing it to *Sheridan*.

The plays of the Restoration are often vile, but those of the eighteenth century are not. Coarse, they may be, now and then; but as to filthy words the coarsest of them falls short of the books of “Numbers,” “Ezekiel,” and “Jeremiah,” in the Bible; and, coarse or refined, they are practically a dead letter to-day—the great bulk of old English comedy being unseen, unread, forgotten, and unknown. When John Gilbert, William Warren, Joseph Jefferson, Lester Wal-

lack, Charles Fisher, William Davidge, and John S. Clarke shall have passed away, the old comedies, so far as the American stage is concerned, will have passed away with them. The traditional manner of acting them—the dash, the “gig,” the sparkle, the lofty, superb demeanour—is fast dying out. There need be no solicitude, accordingly, as to the alleged iniquity of the old comedies. But, even if they were to any considerable extent in possession of the stage, if suitably edited and adequately acted they would at their best prove not only inoffensive, but, as to the elements of character, dialogue, equivoke, and humour, superior to many of the plays of to-day.

After “the spacious times of great Elizabeth” had declined, and prior to the reign of Charles II., the theatres in England were in a wretched condition. There was an inherited dramatic literature of superb and surpassing excellence in all the higher attributes of literary genius and art. But it lived in a hovel. At the Restoration taste and luxury came in, and with them came in licentiousness. A reaction followed, and the stage arose to a still better condition. Under Garrick’s leadership it made a great advance. In later days it received additional impetus to noble improvement from the influence of the Kemble family and the efforts of Macready and Charles Kean. Within the last ten years, in London, Henry Irving has administered its affairs in a thoroughly royal way, and—having ampler resources than they had with which to work, and a much larger and perhaps more attentive and sympathetic, certainly a more fastidious and helpful, public to address—has surpassed all his predecessors in the splendid task of developing and

applying its beneficence, and keeping its intellectual standard high and its moral condition pure. Here in America, after an initiatory period of great hardship, the stage took excellent shape in such institutions as the old Chestnut Street Theatre, in Philadelphia, the John Street house, and afterward the Park (at first called simply "The Theatre"), in New-York, and the Federal Street Theatre, in Boston. The stock companies then were composed of actors almost every one of whom would in our day be a star. Scholarship was the rule, thorough discipline prevailed, and perfect decorum was imperative. Through the growth of our country and the broadening of the theatrical field by the multiplication of theatres the old stock system has been almost entirely destroyed, and opportunity has been provided for the inroad of many hybrid and distasteful, or downright offensive forms of amusement, all of which shelter themselves under the name of the stage. In this way the general dramatic tone has been lowered. America has as good actors now as she ever had; but their forces are not concentrated, and therefore do not seem as formidable as once they did. Nevertheless, the true dramatic spirit burns as brightly as ever in this land, and the practical success of such actors as Booth, Jefferson, McCullough, Lawrence Barrett, Miss Mary Anderson, Miss Clara Morris, Miss Ward, Mme. Modjeska, Mme. Janauschek, Signor Salvini, and Maggie Mitchell is a substantial evidence of it. If a measure of success also attends divers unworthy exhibitions, that is the fault not of the stage but of the public. "Look elsewhere, sire!" These extraneous shows are not the American theatre, any more than the thimble-riggers and gipsy

fortune-tellers on Epsom downs are the race for the Derby.

It is difficult to understand the extreme sensitiveness of certain moralists as to the alleged corrupting influence of the stage. They pay that institution a great compliment in ascribing to it such remarkable power over the public morals; or else, surely, they must conceive individual virtue to be exceedingly fragile. If a censor of the stage were to arraign it as at times a bore it would be possible to appreciate his feelings and sympathise with his views. Many of the proceedings visible upon the stage are trivial and tedious to a degree not readily expressed. Stuffy scenery, ear-piercing music, execrable elocution, nasal vocalism, obvious ignorance, offensive conceit, pitiable vanity, the sad lack of reticence which so often permits a public disclosure of individualities that Nature plainly intended for sweet retirement and deep domestic seclusion,—all these blemishes upon the stage are appreciable. But where does the immoral influence appear? How does it strike? In what manner does its victim conduct himself? Does the youth upon seeing *Iago*, for example, presently rush forth and prod a fancied *Cassio* in a dark street? Is he driven to incontinence by the sight of a pretty woman playing *Parthenia*, or *Pauline*, or *Desdemona*, or *Lady Teazle*? What, then, must be thought of the virtue which melts like wax in the heat of such exceedingly mild fires as these? What becomes of such a person when he is led into society and obliged to stand the tremendous strain of an evening party? It is a great pity, surely, for certain philosophers, and for the weak vessels of the earth in general, that Nature has made women alluring and

roses sweet. But there is one way of safety for all such imperiled creatures. If the stage is really thought to weaken character by undue enticement, you have only to present it as it really is, and that dreaded glamour will vanish like smoke. Divest it of nonsense in your thought. Quit describing it as a fascination of the devil. Cease telling ignorant people to keep away from the one particular room in Blue-Beard's palace. There is not among men a more exacting, laborious, stern profession than that of the stage. There is no place more strictly mechanical and prosaic than a theatre. The stage is not a Paphian Bower; it is a machine-shop. You may as sensibly allege the immoral influence of a cotton factory as the immoral influence of the stage, to those who know it.

The worst influence that proceeds from the stage is one that also proceeds from the pulpit, and perhaps from all artistic pursuits,—the possible weakening of character, from encouragement of the love of admiration in persons who are before the public, whether as actors, orators, writers, preachers, or personal exhibitors of any kind. It takes a long time for a man to learn the usual vagueness, the frequent ignorance, the heedless flippancy, and, therefore, the general worthlessness of the opinions and remarks of most other people about himself or his proceedings; to learn that the only rational way to live is to make duty a rigid law of life and utterly to ignore what people say. Many men never learn this; and actors in particular, whose fortunes depend so immediately on popular liking, are sometimes pitiable in their restless, craving vanity. The same thing is sometimes seen in clergymen. At least half of all that occurs in the

world, whether on the stage or elsewhere, is of no public importance and ought never to be noticed in any way. We should see fewer cases of vanity, and hear less of nobodies and nothings, if society and the press had not such an inveterate disposition to "chronicle small beer."

The literature of the stage has not improved, and for simple and obvious reasons. After Shakespeare it could not improve; for that was the flood-tide. No such man has since appeared. Then likewise the stage has long been a costly institution, dependent on immediate gains and obliged to aim at pleasing an immediate audience. For this reason, as well as by their nature, most of the writers for the stage have been followers and not leaders of the public sentiment. Great writers have their credentials from God; little ones are chartered by the life which surrounds them; and it is the little writers who have furnished most of the stage literature of the last two hundred and fifty years. Shakespeare produced his plays upon the stage; but he wrote them on a scale and with a scope that transcend all theatrical needs and limits, and made them for a stage as broad as the world and as permanent as the human race. Were there no stage at all these works would still survive in all their imperial power and brilliant renown; but, without a stage, the works of most dramatists would vanish like the morning mist. Yet with regard to modern stage literature let us not forget that although the nineteenth century has not in this attained to the altitude of the Elizabethan age, it has fully equalled that of any later period. Knowles, Jerrold, Talfourd, Taylor, Marston, Bulwer, Gilbert, Robertson, Boucicault, Boker,

Payne, Willis, and Epes Sargent are alone sufficient to prove this.

The principal fault of the stage of the present time is frivolity, and this comes from the frivolity of the public and the press. Acting is a learned profession. The stage should be devoted to good plays, well acted, and to nothing else. The position of acting as a learned profession and the utility of the stage as an intellectual force are not entirely appreciated. The public is too easily pleased. Many silly things are accepted. Many commonplace persons are admired and commended. Newspapers, almost without exception, sedulously record, as matters of importance, the theatrical doings of obscure individuals, who by dint of three-sheet posters and lithograph portraits assume to be actors, and, as Dr. Johnson said, make themselves public without making themselves known. All this is out of proportion. Such a state of things tends to lower the value of critical recognition, cheapen the rewards of effort in dramatic art, and bring serious and splendid endeavour and high ambition into contempt.

The world does not advance in wisdom, virtue, and happiness by denial and destruction. All institutions should be bent to the good of all mankind. It was John Wesley, a clergyman, who said that the devil should not have all the good music. Men should not make their lives tributary to their pursuits, but their pursuits tributary to their lives—drawing from the stage, as from all things else, whatever is good and strong, whatever will help to build up and round out a noble character. Must we destroy the stage because a milksop may chance to be injured by it? Is all life to be squared to the tastes and needs of simpletons?

The thing to be desired is gravity and thoroughness in character, more scholarship, habits of study, the rare and noble habit of thinking, in which few persons ever indulge. As the ideals of intellectual effort rise higher in the community, the sincere workers upon the stage, as in every other department of art, will be encouraged and strengthened and the stage itself will be ennobled.





XIX

FAREWELL.

FAR off beyond the shining sea,
Where scarlet poppies glisten
And daisies on the emerald lea
Lift up their heads and listen,
Where Thames and Avon glance and glow,
To-day the waters, straying,
Will murmur in their tranquil flow
The words that we are saying.

Ah, not in parting hours alone
Are those sweet accents spoken;
Farewell, that sobs in sorrow's moan,
May smile in welcome's token.
Farewell, farewell, our hearts will sigh,
When void and dark his place is,
But, oh, fare well is England's cry,
To him her love embraces.

Farewell, thou child of many a prayer,
Thou pride of her that bore thee!
All crystal be the seas that bear
And skies that sparkle o'er thee!
Thy mother's heart, thy mother's lip
Will soon again caress thee —
We can but watch thy lessening ship
And softly say, God bless thee!

But let the golden waves leap up,
While yet our hearts beat near him!
No bitter drop be in the cup
With which our hope would cheer him!
Pour the red roses at his feet!
Wave laurel boughs above him!
And if we part or if we meet
Be glad and proud to love him!

His life has made this iron age
More grand and fair in story;
Illum'd our Shakespeare's sacred page
With new and deathless glory;
Refreshed the love of noble fame
In hearts all sadly faring;
And lit anew the dying flame
Of genius and of daring.

Long may his radiant summer smile
Where Albion's rose is dreaming,
And over art's hesperian isle
His royal banner streaming;

And every trumpet-blast that rolls
From Britain's lips to hail him,
Be echoed in our kindred souls,
Whose truth can never fail him.

On your white wings, ye angel years,
Through roseate sunshine springing,
Waft fortune from all happier spheres,
With garlands and with singing !
Make strong that tender heart and true—
That thought of heaven to guide him—
And blessings pour, like diamond dew,
On her that walks beside him !

And when is said the last farewell,
So solemn and so certain,
And Fate shall strike the prompter's bell,
To drop the final curtain,
Be his, whom every muse hath blest,
That best of earthly closes—
To sink to rest on England's breast
And sleep beneath her roses.



XX

APPENDIX.

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NOTE.

Mr. Irving and Miss Terry, making their first voyage from England to America, sailed from Liverpool, October 11th, 1883, and arrived at New-York, October 21st. The Lyceum Company came over aboard the *City of Rome*, arriving October 19th. At the close of their first American tour, Mr. Irving and Miss Terry sailed from New-York for Liverpool aboard the *Aurania*, May 2d, 1884. The Lyceum Company sailed, April 29th, aboard the *City of Chester*. Mr. Irving and his entire company made their second voyage to America aboard the *Parisian*, leaving Liverpool on September 18th, 1884, and landing at Quebec on September 28th. Mr. Irving's fourth and farewell engagement in New-York was played at the Star Theatre, beginning on March 9th, 1885, with "Eugene Aram," and ending on April 4th, with "Charles I." The only new feature of it was the presentation of "Eugene Aram," which Mr. Irving had already given, January 14th, 1885, for the first time in America, at Chicago, where also, January 20th, he first produced "*Richelieu*" to an American audience. This record is complete when it shall be added that Mr. Irving and Miss Terry sailed from New-York for Liverpool, April 7th, 1885, aboard the *Arizona*, and that the Lyceum Company sailed, April 9th, aboard the *City of Chicago*.

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